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ABSTRACT

This issue of the "Arizona English Bulletin" includes articles concerned with philosophy, psychology, and procedure in the composition classroom at all levels of instruction. Among the topics considered are contending with critics of composition, the back-to-basics movement, the writing process, writing modules, remedial writing, personalized writing courses, literacy in written expression, defining good writing, reading and writing, writing assignments, grammar and composition, teaching research methods, and suggestions for dealing with specific problems in writing and composition. The authors of the papers are Donald R. Gallo, Stephen E. Bowles, Richard Lloyd-Jones, Vivian I. Davis, Robert M. Holland, James Bartell, Robin Kline, Gregory Cowan, R.W. Reising, Margaret and John Fleming, Brian Barabe, Jan A. Guffin, Jim Grimord, Michael F. O'Hear, Hortense Sarot, Lynne B. Kitchens, Sherry L. Reames, Richard L. Graves, George Redman, Kent Kelling, Harrison J. Means, Frank J. D'Angelo, Gail Fisher Briscoe, Russell R. Larson, Jean H. McLellan, Tim Morehouse, Timothy Scannell, Donald Roberts, Aimee Chick, and James H. Chadbourn. (LL)

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ARIZONA ENGLISH BULLETIN

OCTOBER 1976 -THE TEACHING OF COMPOSITION

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reface to the October 1976 *Arizona English Bulletin*

Although the *AEB* was devoted to Rhetoric and Composition in February of 1974, the urrent wave of public concern about Johnny's alleged illiteracy seems sufficiently urent to warrant another issue about teaching writing. The October, 1976 issue differs rom the older one in that most of the articles here deal with the teaching of writing ather than with rhetorical theory. Much of what is said in the older issue about hetoric is still vital, and I recommend that readers turn to it if they find that the mphasis on pedagogy in this issue whets their appetite for more theoretical discusions, as well as for further practical suggestions for use in a composition class.

With the exception of the first articles--which explore the origins and analyze he soundness of the accusations of ineptitude now being hurled at English teachers by he media--the papers included in the current issue of *AEB* are concerned with philosophy, sychology, and procedure in the composition classroom, whether said classroom is loated in an elementary school, a high school, or a college. I hope that the readers f *AEB* will find the articles useful both in their thinking about general approaches to eaching composition and in planning for next semester, or next Monday.

CONTENDING WITH CRITICS OF COMPOSITION

Donald R. Gallo,
Central Connecticut State College

"SEE DICK AND JANE...BECOMING ILLITERATE" blared a newspaper headline last fall. The National Assessment of Educational Progress had just released its first limited report on the second writing assessment, showing a general decline in writing performance among the nation's teenage population. On top of the continuing decline in SAT scores, the NAEP report drove experts and nonexperts wild with speculations during the winter of 1976. Secretaries and socialites, newspaper editors and nextdoor neighbors shared their theories for the declines. A respected writer in the Yale University alumni magazine urged English departments to get "back to the basics" of good grammar teaching. A NEWSWEEK cover story explained "Why Johnny Can't Write," and READER'S DIGEST reprinted that information a few weeks later for millions of readers in thirteen languages.

While the public screamed, complained, and added unfounded theories to the furor which the media happily distributed, teachers, administrators, and school boards cringed. Few people examined the data carefully. As a result, on the basis of inadequate evidence, many demands for reforming writing programs (or starting programs in schools where none have existed) have led to ill-conceived and unwise approaches to remedy obvious problems. Most notable among the public's demands for reform have been more grammar, more discipline, and less free expression.

Being too busy trying to do their job, most English teachers (as well as administrators and school board members) have not taken time to check the data for themselves. And, being generally uninformed about research results, most English teachers don't know any more about the data than NEWSWEEK or hometown newspaper articles have told them. In other words, most members of our profession have no more hard evidence to support their methodology than the most ignorant and biased members of the public have to attack our teaching programs. So let's look at the evidence.

The most obvious fact that Scholastic Aptitude Test scores have declined steadily over the past ten years is indisputable. (A similar drop has occurred also on the ACTs, American College Testing Program.) The reasons for that decline, however, are debatable and have been as varied as the diverse imaginations of the professionals and the lay public can make them: fewer "good" students are taking the exams; more academically disadvantaged students have been taking the exams; there has been an increase in the number of elective courses and a decline in required courses in schools; television has undermined reading and writing skills; teenagers are not as concerned about taking standardized tests and getting into prestigeous colleges as they once were; many students used to take the Preliminary SATs as practice before the SATs, usually increasing their SAT scores, but fewer students now are taking the test more than once.

The theory of one professor of psychology, noted in the April 1976 issue of PSYCHOLOGY TODAY, is that family size and birth order may be responsible for the SAT score decline. The SAT scores peaked during the early 1960s, Dr. Robert Zajonc notes, when many of the firstborn children of the war years entered college. As siblings born during the post-war baby-boom were ready to enter college, SAT scores began to decline. Since firstborn children and children of small families seem to receive more intellectual stimulation from their proximity to parents and other adults, Zajonc believes the birth rate which declined dramatically in 1963 will eventually result in increasing SAT scores by 1980. The truth, perhaps, is that all of those factors just mentioned have some influence in the decline of performance on the SATs. Besides, the American public will never allow us English types to wait patiently until 1980 to see if birth control is indeed the answer to increasing SAT scores.

If reasons for the decline in SAT scores have been haphazardly set forth, they have been no less so for the results of the NAEP Writing Assessment of 1974. The media during the past year has tended to emphasize the general decline in writing performance among teenagers but has neglected some very important findings that the public as well as the teaching profession should be aware of. The following findings have been fairly well publicized:

1. Compared with the results of the 1969 Writing Assessment, there has been an overall decline in writing quality among the nation's 13- and 17-year-olds on the average.

2. The vocabulary of 13-year-olds in the recent assessment was simpler than that found in the 1969 assessment.

3. The average essay written by 13-year-olds in 1974 was shorter, more awkward, and contained more run-on sentences than in the previous assessment.

4. The average 17-year-old wrote more awkwardly, with less coherence, and with more run-on sentences than his predecessors did in 1969.

5. Among writers in all age groups, there was a movement toward sentence patterns and organizational patterns more typical of spoken discourse than of traditional written discourse.

6. Among 13-year-olds, there were fewer writers in the "good" category, and among 17-year-olds there were more writers in the "poor" category in 1974.

Those findings are accurate and indisputable. But there are other accurate and indisputable findings that are not well known among teachers or the public because they have either been played down or ignored in the media. (Most of this data can be found in WRITING MECHANICS, 1969-1974: A CAPSULE DESCRIPTION OF CHANGES IN WRITING MECHANICS published by the National Assessment of Educational Progress and available from the U.S. Government Printing Office for $1.30.)

1. Although there has been a general decline in writing performance on the average, the decline has not been constant in all aspects of writing nor for all categories of writers.

2. Among 13-year-olds and 17-year-olds there has been no increase in percentages of sentence fragments in their essays from 1969 to 1974.

3. Nine-year-olds on the average wrote slightly better in 1974 than their counterparts did in 1969.

4. Although the average 17-year-old in 1974 wrote less well and poor writers seemed to get worse, the essays of 17-year-old writers in the "good" category were longer, as good as, and possibly better than the writings of students in the same category five years earlier.

5. Among most 13-year-olds and 17-year-olds in America, there has not been a significant increase in grammar or spelling errors during the past five years. Mechanical errors in general have not increased.

6. The percentages of mechanical errors are generally consistent across the three age groups surveyed. As students mature, the percentages of most mechanical errors neither increase nor decrease.

These findings require and deserve additional commentary.

Part of the reason for the improvement in the writing of nine-year-olds in the latest survey may be that their writing task prompted a more creative response while the task for older writers elicited a more "schoolish" response. But there was no decline in the writing of America's nine-year-olds, nevertheless--a positive sign that should not go unnoticed.

While high scores as well as average and low scores on SATs have declined, the performance of "good" writers among the total 17-year-old population on the National Assessment writing task did not decline but even showed signs of improving. Since the National Assessment surveys a group that is far more representative of the nation as a whole than does the College Entrance Examination Board on the SATs, this finding is promising.

The widespread cry among parents, business leaders, and many educators for more instruction in grammar and spelling is not supported by the National Assessment findings. In fact, if teachers are pressured into spending more time teaching more grammar and spelling, they will probably do so at the expense of teaching the skills of organization, clarity, and sentence structure--skills which, according to the Assessment findings, need more attention, not less.

The consistency of the numbers of mechanical errors across age levels is interesting and significant. Most mechanical errors do not decrease as age increases. For example, the writing of students in all three age groups surveyed by the National Assessment contained an average of one capitalization error, one fragment, and one run-on sentence in each 100 words of writing. Punctuation errors, on the other hand, seem to increase with age, but understandably so. The writing of 13-year-olds and 17-year-olds contains more punctuation errors per 100 words than that of 9-year-olds, but that seems due to the fact that the writing of most 9-year-olds contains few sentence structures that require punctuation. Fourth graders in the study had little difficulty in punctuating adverbial clauses, for instance, because most fourth graders never write such clauses in the first place. Spelling errors, in contrast, do become far less frequent with age. That is, 9-year-olds made an average of eight spelling errors per 100 words of writing, while 13-year-olds made four and 17-year-olds made only two.

One of the most serious errors that critics have made in reacting to data such as these is their failure to realize that many mechanical errors in student writing cannot be eliminated as students mature and pass through the grades. They cannot be eliminated (as much as we all may want and would appreciate that) simply because, as students mature, their written language changes and becomes more sophisticated, thereby offering continually new opportunities for errors. Errors in awkward constructions and in punctuation are bound to occur as the writing of students becomes more syntactically complex.

None of this is intended to gloss over the clear evidence that the writing of students in general has deteriorated in many important ways. But in talking with other professionals, in teaching our classes daily, in dealing with a critical public and an understandably uptight administration, and in planning for curriculum changes we need to be aware of all the data. As with the SAT scores, there are no obvious or clear-cut reasons for increases or declines in writing performance, no matter what factors various educational critics have cited.

Should more emphasis be placed on teaching composition? Certainly. Especially in those schools where English class usually means a course in literature or grammar. Should more emphasis be placed on the basics of grammar and spelling? No, that would be wasteful, academically unsound, and foolish in light of the evidence (unless an individual school or system has evidence that their students are more deficient in those skills than the rest of the nation is). English teachers should resist attempts to get them to teach more grammar and spelling in traditional ways (provided that they are teaching some grammar and spelling to begin with). Instead, English teachers would be wiser to concentrate more on teaching skills of clarity, organization, and sentence structure. Less naming of sentence parts and more sentence expansion activities should be most productive.

How can teachers learn more about sound and successful methods of teaching composition? Read articles in professional journals such as this one and THE ENGLISH JOURNAL. Take a graduate course in teaching writing from a reputable college professor if you know of one nearby. Attend local, regional, and national conferences to talk with other teachers about what they are doing that works. Share more ideas with colleagues at department meetings. If your school has some funds for inservice activities, invite an expert to conduct a workshop with your staff.

And when you do something, involve your school's administrators. Members of the community too. Share the data from this and other articles with your school board and with the most vocal critics of your school system. Publicize successful composition teaching techniques throughout the community through a newsletter to parents and community leaders. Invite critical parents (as well as supportive ones) to volunteer an hour (or two or three) each week to work with you in your classes helping kids write on an individual basis.

Above all, stay informed. The most frustrating thing about getting criticisms from the public (as well as from the school administration) is not having any contrasting data to support our side of the issues, thus forcing us to back quietly and shakily into little dark corners or to lash out with rationalizations of "too many kids" and "not enough time." (There are too many kids in many classes, and good teachers never have enough time, but those aren't reasons that will convince the public.) Knowing about research on the general ineffectiveness of traditional grammar study on writing improvement, knowing where to get the data on the whole picture from National Assessment publications, and knowing what other teachers are doing successfully in their own classrooms across the country are things that will provide us with the ammunition we need to ward off attacks from irrational critics. Those same sources will also provide us with useful information for attacking and correcting problems we've known all along are there in our classes in the front row, in the back row, in the third row....

THE BACK-TO-BASICS MOVEMENT: BACKGROUNDS, ISSUES AND QUESTIONS

Stephen E. Bowles, University of Miami

When a leading national new magazine devotes a cover story to "Why Johnny Can't Write"[1] and a major editorial to scholastic grade-inflation,[2] when a newspaper with over one-million daily circulation runs a series of articles on "Why Can't Johnny Write?",[3] and when a Congressional sub-committee is assigned to investigate the significant deterioration in national scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test, then it becomes quite appropriate to ask the question: "What, exactly, is basic about the teaching of composition?"

No longer are the proverbial gripes and bitches about the teaching of writing confined to the polemics of English department coffee lounges and curriculum committees. Such an unprecedented wave of protest and inquiry about our competency to teach writing indicates that the teaching of writing is not merely idle academic chatter. Although complaints about composition programs are not new,[4] for the first time our concerns about composition instruction are also the public's concerns; composition has, like a political campaign, become a national issue.

This paper is not intended as a summary of research, not an indictment against the system, nor is it a crusade for educational reform. These have all been well discussed and documented elsewhere. It is meant as a series of personal reflections which will attempt to place the current issues and challenges now confronting composition programs into a more unified perspective.

Beginning in the last years of the nineteen-fifties, as one of the many provisional repercussions of the Sputnik crisis, our academic emphasis was bolstered to compete in a world of nuclear propulsion and cerebral computers. Soviet science and technology had thrust man beyond the limits of his planet into a world previously imagined only by philosophers and artists. The arts and humanities (including composition), traditionally revered as the interpreters of man's place in the universe, suddenly seemed irrelevant and extraneous to this new age.

Either by divine proclamation or historic irony, the accelerated interest in science and technology in the early and mid-sixties coincided with the peak of the post-war baby boom. The offspring of the Second World War were then beginning to make decisions about their future. The prevailing obsession with advanced education, especially in the sciences and technology, directed many of them toward college programs. Once in college the Vietnam involvement, reaching national awareness in the mid-sixties, encouraged many to continue, seeking higher degrees to remain free from military service in a futile conflict. The results of this continued education, appearing about a decade after the Sputnik scare, were the first warnings of "over-education" and "over-qualification" (euphemisms which were only slightly comprehensible) when the job market could not adequately absorb so many graduates with such outstanding academic backgrounds. Berkeley physicists and MIT engineers were found selling insurance in Los Angeles and driving taxicabs in New York.

With the rise of the youth movements in the second half of the sixties, protesting the advertised atrocities of our "war" (undeclared and ambiguous as it was) involvement, it became apparent that what was needed (and demanded) was not the quaint antiquity of McGUFFY'S READER or the rules and regulations of the HARBRACE COLLEGE HANDBOOK (neither of which seemed to have meaning in a modern world), but rather something directly applicable to the real world in which we live. The call for "relevancy" in education resounded throughout the latter years of the sixties.

Composition programs were especially vulnerable to the relevancy accusations leveled against academia.[5] "English departments aren't doing their job" came the charge of bureaucrats in the sixties. Studies were abundantly made and cited to demonstrate that the writing quality of students was not "significantly" improved by completing a composition course or series.

Composition programs were placed on the defensive. If we taught grammar and spelling, we were accused of wasting time on trivialities; if we taught logic and rhetoric, we were accused of being too abstract. Composition was also fraught with internal inconsistencies. This teacher wanted an introduction-body-conclusion arrangement, that one wanted daily journal entries; this one wanted free association, that one wanted short stories; this teacher marked off for comma splices while that teacher didn't seem to care.

Under the profound influences of McLuhan's electronic environment, gestalt group therapy, Vietnamese body counts, Masters and Johnson sex research, drug induced mind-expansion, and manifestoes of women's liberation and racial equality,[6] it was certainly no accident that pot-pourri textbooks, audio-visual substitutes, creative writing approaches (all valid in their own domain) proliferated and dominated English classes in all grades and all quarters of the nation: anything to be different, to be innovative, to be experimental, to be "relevant." Mixed Bag became the representative text for the period.

In our enthusiasm for new programs and new approaches, some schools even went so far as to advocate that the best way to cope with the problem of composition was simply to eliminate the problem-area itself. And so composition requirements were gradually dropped from an increasing number of colleges. Like the "new math" syndrome that preceded it, the relevancy bandwagon rolled through the latter sixties and into the seventies.

At the same time the relevancy issue was manifesting itself in the classroom, college administrative policies were undergoing a transition. The colleges which had expanded with public demand to meet the influx of the war-baby population in the sixties were beginning to feel the threat of cutbacks in the seventies as the boom-cycle subsided. Colleges very quickly changed from the privileged position of isolated desirability to the aggressive policies of big-business advertising. Pressures on four-year colleges intensified as community colleges grew in both numbers and accessibility. State supported centers of higher education rocked in the waves as the seventies economic recession hit; private institutions floundered. To compete for the dwindling number of students, colleges lowered admission requirements (admitting many students they formerly would have rejected) and publicized progressive reforms (such as the campaign to abandon traditional composition courses). This appeal, it was believed, would attract potential students and their supportive tuition fees.

While most colleges managed to at least remain solvent during these times of peril, the academic emphasis on quality education seemed less imperative. Many faculty members (and administrators), sadly but understandably, were willing to exchange a measure of classroom standards (i.e., grades) for a measure of professional security (i.e., jobs). Students were certainly more attracted to colleges where the academic rigors had been liberalized and the grading policies made less stringent.

Now the pendulum has, it seems, swung back again. We're worried--and rightly so--about the distressing national decline in basic educational skills, as registered in both the Scholastic Aptitude Tests and the College Board Examinations. Both testing procedures confirm the same result: since the mid-sixties, scores have fallen with an uncomfortable regularity.[7]

A new crisis now faces the academic community. Demands for relevancy have now (a decade later) yielded to demands for proficiency. The source of our present alarm, however, is less from the students who go through the curriculum than from the businesses who have hired graduates of the relevancy generation. In fairness, we might have guided these students toward more creativity and independence (and that, certainly, was beneficial), but in doing so we seem to have sacrificed the basic standards of writing required by the practical-minded economic ethos which is attempting to absorb these students.

Many reasons have been offered for the decline in literacy of high school and college graduates. Critics and sympathizers are quick to cite the cutbacks necessitated by rising costs, the non-verbal emphasis encouraged by television, and (of course) the poor teaching in composition courses.

This last reason is particularly interesting. While the other reasons proposed are all external (for which the schools can hardly be held accountable), the internal opposition to composition courses is many-fold. Compounding the weak position of composition in the past has been the strong hostility of English teachers to debase themselves by, firstly, condescending to teach a subject--composition--which lacks the glamor and prestige of literature and, secondly, teaching a subject--composition--which cannot be taught).

The first body of opposition maintains that composition is somehow degrading to teach. It is the usual procedure to assign only new or young teachers and otherwise expendable staff members to composition courses, since this expediency then frees other faculty members to devote themselves to more important endeavors. The condescending stigma associated with composition remains a deeply entrenched academic nerve. In the MLA JOB INFORMATION LIST, for example, there recently appeared the following notice of a vacancy: "We are looking for a new Ph.D. in English Literature who would be able and willing, despite the dignity of an Assistant Professorship, to begin with a program of two sections of Freshman English..."[8]

The second body of opposition contends that writing is an activity that cannot be taught. Writing is, rather, a mysterious blend of imagination, experience, talent, practice and dedication. The great essayists (from Montaigne to Lawrence to Wolfe) are interesting not because they exemplify any rules of writing, but because they know how to make language and thought compatible. Since writing can't be taught (unlike literary criticism, which can), writing classes are often scorned as one of the necessary evils (the "bread and butter") of English departments. When a teacher has devoted several years of sacrifice to the pursuit of a degree in literature, why should he be expected (or even asked) to perform the menial functions of teaching composition?

Even the terms used to describe composition courses possess pejorative associations. For example, the term "composition" itself is double-edged. When we employ the word "composition" to discuss painting or music or architecture, it suggests a stimulating and often provocative experience. But when used in the context of a writing class, it usually implies (at least to the student) an identification with grammatical dissection, writing drills or some equally dreary and imposing activity. Similarly, the term "rhetoric" is either thought of as something remotely connected to the Greeks (and hence obscure, difficult and antiquated) or it is something associated with the suspicious art of persuasion (after all, the lawyer doesn't announce to the jury that he will employ "rhetoric" in his arguments, but more often is apt to denounce "rhetoric" as the deceitful practice employed by the opposition).

All of these hostile elements within our own ranks make it doubly difficult and frustrating for the person who not only affirms that students have intelligence but that writing can be taught. The academic deviate who believes in and actually wants to teach composition has typically been left to wage a lonely (and often losing) struggle.

It has, of course, now reached the point where the basics are no longer definable as they once were. We used to be able to say (with some authority): "Can Johnny spell hippopotamus?" "Does Johnny know the difference between lay and lie?" "Does Johnny know what the word prestidigitation means?" and, by these kinds of diagnostic questions and demonstrable answers, we could tell whether or not Johnny really knew the basics. There was little serious emphasis on thinking or relating or creating--those concerns, after all, more properly belong to other departments: to philosophy, to psychology, to art.

First we must ask: "What are the basics?" Are they the "basics" of construction (of grammar, spelling, syntax) or the "basics" of thought (of analysis, exposition, logic)? To some, getting back to the basics means getting back to ENGLISH 3200 and telling war stories, while to others it means getting back to the rigors of expository analysis and clarity of expression. Second we must ask: "What can we hope to accomplish?" Do we want Johnny to be a creative artist or a technical report writer? Shall we emphasize the writing of polished prose or the writing of advertising jingles? And third we must ask: "What can realistically be done?" Given the short period of time and the heavy work load in teaching composition, what can we do to help both Johnny and society (and, incidentally, our profession)?

A few years ago the term "relevant" was beaten to death in an attempt to make the educational system more viable and attractive to "now-thinking" youths, raised on a diet of Vietnamese body counts and university protest movements. Now it appears that for another generation, this time raised on rock music and pocket calculators--the word "basics" is about to be beaten to a similar death in an attempt to make the educational system salvageable.

Yet I would suggest that we did learn something--something important--from the period of relevancy. What I would hope is that we are not ready to simply jettison that period of composition in an over-reactive and self-defensive "back to basics" mobilization to answer the accusations directed against our profession.

There is, of course, nothing new or wrong with change, whether it applies to football rulings or Supreme Court decisions. Although change has been with us from the beginning, we never seem to accept it (let alone welcome it). Without the disruption of change, we could never have advanced from stone to bronze to iron, from Aristotle to Newton to Einstein. Change is not only the only means we have to advance, but the only means to escape boredom or stagnation. The trap we must guard against in the process of change is to simply equate new with better or different with advance. McGUFFY'S READER, I would suggest, can (and indeed should) sit on the same shelf with MIXED BAG.

NOTES

[1] "Why Johnny Can't Write," NEWSWEEK (December 8, 1975), pp. 58-65. This article has been condensed and reprinted in READER'S DIGEST (April, 1976), pp. 174-187.

[2] George F. Will, "D is for Dodo," NEWSWEEK (February 9, 1976), p. 84.

[3] Bob Schenet, "Why Can't Big Johnny Write?," CHICAGO DAILY NEWS (November 5, 1975), pp. 5-6.

[4] See Leonard Greenbaum, "The Tradition of Complaint," COLLEGE ENGLISH, v. 31, n. 2 (November, 1969), pp. 73-77.

[5] See, for example, "Mediocrity Enthroned," WALL STREET JOURNAL (October 30, 1969), p. 14.

[6] See, for example, William L. O'Neill, COMING APART: AN INFORMAL HISTORY OF AMERICA IN THE 1960'S (Quadrangle Press, 1971) for an excellent survey of the period.

[7] For two of many references to this issue, see "The Decline in SAT Scores," NEWSWEEK (March 8, 1976), p. 58, and "College Board Scores Show Largest Decline Since 1964," CHICAGO TRIBUNE (February, 1976).

[8] Lafayette College, MLA JOB INFORMATION LIST (December, 1975).

REQUEST FOR MANUSCRIPTS

The April issue of the *Arizona English Bulletin* will be devoted to English teacher preparation. We would like to publish a series of personal accounts by practicing teachers of their professional academic preparation. Such accounts should include comments about how well undergraduate and graduate study prepared teachers for the work they now do, as well as suggestions for improving the college curriculum. Deadline for manuscripts is February 1, 1977.

A PRIMER FOR READING CRITICS OF STUDENT WRITING

Richard Lloyd-Jones, University of Iowa

Again the cry goes out, "Johnny can't write!" So what else is new? For a hundred years critics have been complaining that American youth is illiterate. Usually their attacks have been aimed at schools, although they have saved some scorn for almost every institution of American life.

Similar cries from business began a little later and are generally less elegant. Often the charges degenerate into comments on spelling and punctuation, perhaps because the lay critics lack the precise vocabulary to talk about the more serious deficiencies. But the pattern is an old one. Some clay tablets in ancient Sumer report complains about the writing skills of the young.

Yet to dismiss the issue because it is overstated or misstated by alarmists or old fogies is to ask for trouble. If we are really to have Americans write as well as they need to, we must cut through the fog of false claims. We need a system of questions for challenging the claims.

First, who is Johnny? The simplicity of that question is disarming, but some people use studies based on a single group to condemn a much larger group. Some reports, such as those based on the American College Tests (ACT) or the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT), refer to applicants to college. So also do most statements quoted from directors of freshman English. Comments from professors in other fields usually refer to students who have been admitted to college, often juniors or seniors, or even graduate students. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) refers to children of 9, 13, and 17 years. Nor is that all. NAEP uses a Gallup-like sample of all children, but ACT and ETS deal with those who want to go to college (a changing sample of the population) and professors talk about the people who actually choose their classes (often a very lopsided sample). The hazard, then, is that editorialists, may use data on the writing of all 13-year olds, including both the psychologically disturbed and socially inept as well as the brilliantly verbal and intellectually facile, to condemn the average college prep student.

Second, what is writing? That question is so simple that it seems stupid until you try to find a precise answer. Some people mean the physical act of making appropriate marks on paper to represent speech. They talk about spelling and punctuation and handwriting. These are useful skills, but clearly different from the ability to reason and to discourse on ideas, which are far more important elements of writing. Somewhere in between those two extreme definitions is the emphasis on fashioning conventional sentences, especially to accommodate the differences between oral and written language.

In a common sense world these distinctions would not cause problems, but in the classroom world the issues are important. School tests offer indirect measurement, so the person who gets the results of a test may not realize what skills actually were tested and thus may make totally wrong conclusions about writing skills. For example, the scribal skills of spelling and punctuating are easily tested, and the conventional patterns of teaching them usually demand less of a teacher--that is, cost less--so it is tempting to let complaints about mechanics seduce a school district into concentrating on a relatively minor element of writing at the expense of more crucial meaning. A school might make itself look good on some standardized tests without even engaging skill in discourse.

Third, what does "can't" mean? Most complaints come from an older person talking about the writing of a relatively few students in relation to some specific purpose of the older person. Often the complainer is a biased judge. Sometimes it is a person who is good at technical writing, say, judging a person who may be a fairly good essayist but who doesn't understand the subject or the conventions of technical prose. The teacher confuses ignorance of the subject with lack of skill in writing. Perhaps the issue is to recognize what is appropriate writing for a given situation, the most common problem in discourse. It has more to do with social experience than it does with writing skill.

Older people may be judging groups of students with a wide range of abilities in comparison with what they remember of their own writing when they were in school--writing which was not as good as they remember. Furthermore it was probably the writing of one of the better students at that. Or the complainer may run a writing program and be looking for ways to shift the blame or to get the money for more teachers. In short, one unsystematic witness, even one who reads a lot, is probably not a good source of evidence for claims that writing is either better or worse nowadays. Still, such people make exciting statements and thus get good press coverage. Viewing with alarm is dramatic, especially if the problem can be oversimplified.

Systematic research into the questions of quality is clearly to be preferred, but the best of it is barely adequate. Writing is so much interwoven with the nature of the society and the psychological makeup of the individuals that its essential qualities are elusive. Most studies of writing talk about single pieces serving clearly defined social purposes--and even then the results of criticism have usually been challenged. Our recent efforts to describe large quantities of writing by many people are barely begun.

In the real world, for example, we know that persuasive writing works when it sells cars or elects candidates. We know that explanations are satisfactory if the reader can do or understand what the writing says. We are less sure whether a person has truly expressed his sense of truth or feelings because we don't have a resulting action to observe, although we can recognize that some people write so well that they express our own feelings for us. And literary works almost always provide grounds for quarreling.

Writing in a test world has no direct outcome. "Exercise" persuasion as in a school assignment or in a mass test doesn't really persuade anybody; a judge has to guess whether it contains the kinds of language which might persuade someone. Most efforts to collect samples of writing systematically, as in the NAEP testing program, permit only very brief exercises. The subject must fit large numbers of people, so it really fits no one exactly. Often the individual writer has nothing at stake. Both getting the sample of writing and making meaningful comments about several thousand papers on the same subject present real problems. NAEP is making slow progress, but so far the results are useful primarily in guiding future study of how to judge writing. The financing of future research may require scare headlines, but the work done so far does not really justify comments about whether student writing taken in groups is better or worse. We have to settle for saying that sample A is better than sample B in accomplishing a given purpose at a given time and place.

Other forms of systematic testing deal with single elements of writing--vocabulary, usage, syntax--and although each is related to the whole, the exact relationship is far from clear. Often people with very large vocabularies write badly. Usage tests tend to measure social standing more than they measure skill in discourse. And so on. These standardized tests, which are easy to administer, are open to challenge almost in direct proportion to the ease of administration, and since the results on the multiple choice items must be related to the demonstrated ability of individuals to write, each standardized test also must compound the errors of any method used to judge large amounts of actual discourse. Comments on skills in discourse based on such tests probably should be ignored.

The sad truth is that the public wailing about the quality of writing has far more to say about the personality and motives of those who are moaning than it does about the quality of writing. We just don't know much about writing in bulk lots.

But the even sadder truth is that none of us write as well as we perhaps could and probably need to, and that is a problem for schools. The ability to use language defines humans, and the ability to use written language defines human ideas and emotions most precisely and most enduringly. Often, as we write, we discover what we think and feel. Our ability to control language in a variety of ways determines much of our adaptability in coping with our personal crises and with those of our jobs. To some extent we imagine the hopes and fears and abilities and motives of other people because we have the language with which to shape our empathy. In an important sense all of our schooling is designed to make us better users of the language, so the quality of writing produced in and out of school must always be a central social problem. Other problems may demand our short-term attention, but in the long run our ability to write is the central issue of education.

The issue, then, is not whether writing is better or worse, but how we can make everyone more skillful. Until we are all saints and sages our writing is not good enough. Our skill in handling the language is not limited to what we learn in school; that isn't even the major way of learning, although schools supply some crucial skills and can enhance or speed up learning. We learn to write by writing in real situations which demand writing, but some of the situations should be in school, and we can acquire some skills in exercises. But so long as teachers assign little writing--and teachers meeting 100 students a day cannot assign much writing--then schools cannot help much. So long as teachers themselves know little about language or discourse, so long as they do little writing themselves, so long as only English teachers are expected to be interested in writing, so long as writing is publically justified only for its commercial use and not for its personal value, so long as adults rarely write under circumstances which the young recognize as important, then the improvement of writing will be slow in coming.

An appropriate program is easy to outline, but difficult to put in effect. Teachers of writing must be trained for the task. (School administrators often assume that teachers of literature are automatically teachers of writing.) The study of writing needs to be more widely honored as an academic discipline. Teachers must be given the time to assign and read thoughtfully the papers written by students. Teachers in other disciplines need to be guided to greater sophistication about language and discourse in forms other than the ones they regularly use. And finally people in general must be fussy about their own writing, must write for pleasure as well as for duty, and must honor and admire good pieces of writing. Probably it is easier just to complain about how "kids don't write so good no more."

TOWARD A MODEL OF THE COMPOSING PROCESS

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The traditional approach to the teaching of writing imposes rules, structures and patterns on the writer. It ignores the composing process and focuses on the product--the written composition. Currently, however, we are learning that the written piece is only part of a complex process which begins before the pen touches the paper. Understanding the composing process can radically change the methods by which we teach and evaluate writing. Presently we do not know a great deal about the process. We agree that it probably has three broad stages, variously labeled and described, but for the sake of simplicity, here identified as: pre-writing, writing and rewriting. What we do not know, and have need of learning, is exactly what discrete steps are included in each of the stages, how those steps effect one another and how they combine to form the composing process. In short, we need a model of the composing process. A model should begin to explain how writing is generated and help us to locate those places in the process where teacher intervention may or may not be necessary.

Our profession has been justifiably fearful of attempts to quantify and objectify the humanities and creative arts. The popular misuse of behavior modification theories and practices have made us leery of anything purporting to be a scientific analysis in our discipline. On the other hand, we are at least subliminally aware that the teaching of writing involves making some disposition of a congeries of skills, perceptions, socio-psycholinguistic realities and strictures of the written code itself. Though our teaching has not always reflected it, we know that writing is convoluted and cyclical. So little knowledge though is not enough and can be dangerous.

We tend to ascribe mythical explanations to what we do not understand. Teachers come perilously close to assigning writing success to the realm of myth by such statements as: "Writing is a talent some have and others don't." "Writing just cannot be taught." Without a model of the composing process, it is difficult or impossible to evaluate the usefulness of the many writing theories extant in our discipline. Much of what the writer does has not been brought to consciousness, therefore, we lack the language to discuss it. Our present state of knowledge leaves us little alternative but to teach from the traditional approach or to adopt some trial and error approach. We need to do serious, scholarly, long-term observations grounded in honest interaction with out students as the first step toward constructing a workable model of the composing process.

Admittedly I speak of a long-term goal, but the task can be begun immediately even if the ultimate goal should never be achieved. Though our beginning investigations will be tenuous, a great deal can be learned as the state of knowledge on this subject advances to higher levels of sophistication. The best sources for scrutiny of the composing process are in our own classes. The remainder of this paper shares some observations which a group of students and I made. Our work is impressionistic and of necessity, simplistic. It is not offered as the definitive work on the composing process. However, it does illustrate how it is possible to move toward an explanatory model of the composing process.

Students in one of my methods classes were shocked when they realized that as senior English majors they were only a few months away from their first classroom assignments and did not know how to teach writing. The class had studied the current literature on the role of the teacher in the composition classroom, theories of composition, and how writing should be evaluated. They wondered, however, what the teacher could tell students to help them understand how to improve their own writing. We tried to come to some answers to that question by contemplating exactly step-by-step what one does in writing. My students were asked to write a theme and while doing so to be conscious of everything they did in the process of writing the theme. They were then asked to write down, in as detailed fashion as they could, each step that went into writing their compositions. The class discussed each student's responses with that student. When we felt we had a useful understanding of the steps reported by each student, we tried to determine what if any of the steps were reported by all of the students. This part of the work required much discussion because no common language exists for the concepts we were trying to describe. It did not take long to realize that we would not be able to study the entire composing process in enough depth to make it worthwhile. Because we felt that most of the literature focuses on the written product itself, we decided to confine our work to the pre-writing stage of the process. We isolated, labeled, defined and discussed six steps which we believed to be the usual components of pre-writing: stimulation, ideation, plotting, bundling, verbalizing and recoding. We believe pre-writing involves both internal and external phenomena and activity, and that the steps in the stage interact with and overlap one another. Understanding each of the steps can help the teacher to enable students to locate their own hangups in the process.

Stimulation, which is necessarily the first step for any writer, is an internal mental response to some external object or situation. Stimulation is mental alertness or arousal which is triggered by something in one's environment. That something may be what one senses--sees, hears or smells, a classroom assignment or sometimes, if stimulation is totally internal, what one senses as a threat or a pleasure, or dreams, for example. Psychologists may be able to explain why different individuals are stimulated by different things, but it should be already clear that teachers cannot expect one assignment to stimulate every student in any given class. It is implied also, that stimulation may take place at different rates of speed under different conditions for different people. If stimulation does not occur, the student cannot go on with the composing process. If the student is under pressure to produce a composition regardless, the teacher may expect a stock theme or in the worst cases, cheating. When, however, stimulation does occur, the person is likely to move almost automatically to the next step in the pre-writing stage--ideation.

Ideation is not an accurate term for the pre-writing step it refers to. As it is used here, ideation means recalling past experiences or stored information, associating and fantasizing. During ideation one scans the mental files of experiences, feelings, and pieces of information which have been accumulated and stored in the brain. In response to stimulation, the person seeks out the appropriate file depending on what the individual perceives as appropriate. Clearly, editing begins with this step in the process. The person may associate stored material to the source of stimulation or associate sets of stored material with other sets. Fantasizing allows the individual to create new situations or realities in response to the source of stimulation or in relationship to stored material. My students noted some pitfalls in this step which could detour the writer: Idation in itself can be pleasurable. The individual may be so satisfied scanning mental files or fantasizing that there is no reason to move on to the remaining steps in the process. The person may get stuck repeating this step over and over and enjoying it too much to move on. On the other hand, ideation can close down the entire composing process. If the student locates a mental file that is too traumatic, too embarrassing or too personal, he may or may not be able to push beyond it. There is always the danger of the individual's getting entangled in past emotional webs and spending the time and energy that ought to be available to writing trying to solve old problems. It may be expected that a student so stymied will find it difficult to write at all. He will likely procrastinate or skip the assignment altogether. Continuous occurrence of this kind of problem, however, indicates something more serious than missing a step in the composing process. Ideation is internal, but it interacts with stimulation. Stimulation cues ideation and the person refers to the external object of stimulation to evaluate the validity of the experience or information recalled, associated or fantisized in the ideation step. Ideation also interacts with the step labeled "plotting."

Plotting, as part of the composing process, does not refer to the development of a story line. It means ordering the material brought forward by ideation according to the context in which the writing will be done. In other words, plotting means locating the readers and deciding how the material can be communicated to them under whatever circumstances exist. At least part of this step is an internal reaction to some external realities when the readers and the situation are given. On the other hand, plotting can be almost all internal if the writer chooses or creates the readers and/or the situation. Plotting requires knowledge of the culture and the writer's understanding of the relationship he has or may have with the readers. The writer may need to return to ideation from plotting because he must have a fit between material, readers and situation.

We labeled the next step we observed, bundling. Again it is apparent that the language for discussing this work has not yet been invented. Bundling interacts with both plotting and ideation. It is the step in which the writer begins to arrange related parts of the materials ideated into categories. The bundles may be put together in chronological, spatial or logical compartments, or parts of the material may be tied together according to themes or characters, for example. This step in the process is tediously internal. It may lead the writer back to ideation, forward to verbalizing, back again to ideation, up to plotting again and beyond bundling to recoding. Because it is circular and not easily directed, it can be one of the more frustrating steps in the process. Students often complain that they cannot decide how to arrange their material; how to put ideas together. Oftentimes teachers attempt to help by having the student write an outline. Unfortunately, outlining is a self-contained activity which rather than helping the student through bundling, allows him to escape the composing process altogether by substituting some external structure for the inherent structure that is attempting to evolve.

There is no doubt that we all use some kind of language in order to think. One might wonder then how verbalizing could be identified as one discrete step in the composing process. From the observations and discussions in my classroom, I am convinced, for the present at least, that the individual does not use the same language in internal thinking that he uses in communicating to others. Verbalizing involves finding the right words, phrases and strings of words to turn the ideated material into socially acceptable written communication. At this step of the process a great deal of editing occurs. The writer has to decide what his readers know and what clues he needs to give them so that they will locate appropriate experiences or pieces of knowledge in their own mental files, and so that they will make appropriate associations. It is obvious then that verbalizing interacts with both plotting and bundling. Verbalizing requires the writer to take both the part of the reader and his own part as writer. As this goes on, some students reported saying to themselves or appearing to hear the very words that they would write while at the same time contemplating the reader's questions and responses. A kind of fantasized dialogue takes place between writer and reader. It seems that this step is crucial because it may be considered the bridge between an internal part of the process and a totally externalized part--the written code. Students may have some difficulty fantasizing the dialogue. They may learn how to complete the step by role playing with someone who would take the part of the reader. In my class, we discovered that one should never role play a great deal of the dialogue if the assignment is to be written. It appears that if the students receive a great deal of satisfaction from being able to communicate orally, they may have no need to communicate in written form. Furthermore, we observed that a second person may influence the writer to the extent he loses control of the composing process. That is, the second person may begin to evaluate or to associate or fantasize in a way disagreeable to the writer. The interaction may turn into a situation in which the writer feels he has to defend his creativity and he will be sidetracked from the composing process. On the other hand, just the right amount of role play or discussion may help the writer through verbalizing on to recoding. It should be mentioned that some writers are quite capable of verbalizing internally and do not wish to have another person involved in the process though they may even be slow to complete the step. Obviously, their preferences must be observed. Though it certainly begins in the pre-writing stage, verbalizing would be expected to continue through the writing and rewriting stages.

Recoding is so labeled because it is the step at which the writer turns verbalizations into the written code. Recoding requires the ability to draw the letters, to spell and to observe the mechanical rules of the written code. It also requires understanding the grammar of the written language and the acceptable usage rules and a sense of style. Recoding is the very act of externalizing most of what the writer has been developing in the entire pre-writing stage of the composing process. It marks both the end of the pre-writing stage and the beginning of the writing stage. Recoding interacts with and may overlap plotting, bundling, and verbalizing. Sometimes recoding requires the writer to go through each of the earlier steps again before writing can continue. Often, once recoding begins, it goes quickly until apparently a bundle of material is recoded. The actual writing may then stop while the writer returns to one or more previous steps in the pre-writing stage. It should be clear why recoding is perhaps the most challenging part of the entire composing process. It is usually the first time since stimulation that the writer is committed to externalizing what has been taking place internally. It is the culmination of several other steps. The student knows from past experiences that his work will be judged by what is on the paper, regardless of what may have been or is in his head. Editing occurs at several points during recoding. There is the danger of losing tone, clarity, parts of a narrative, an association or fantasy as one records; therefore, it may be very difficult for a writer to work within a predesignated time period. Recoding produces the first written draft of the composition. That draft is to the writer more or less what the sketch is to the painter. Far from being the finished product, the first draft is the imperative outline which is itself a step in the completion of the composing process.

The work reported in this paper is impressionistic; nonetheless, it makes clear the fact that the composing process is complex and non-linear. It explains how the steps in the pre-writing stage of the process fold back onto and overlap one another. Though it identifies discrete steps, it describes them in such a way as to reinforce the cyclical nature of the composing process. This report does not claim to outline the pre-writing stage as it is followed by all or any writers, but it does illustrate that the kind of analysis necessary to constructing a model of the whole composing process is possible. It demonstrates that observation and analysis of the composing process can make available useful information that can help facilitate our teaching and learning to write.

PIAGETIAN THEORY AND THE DESIGN OF COMPOSING ASSIGNMENTS

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I would guess there are as many different ways of saying what composing really is as there are teachers of composition; probably more. But I think there are some basic aims shared by all of us who teach composition, and I want to talk briefly about some of those aims and describe how the developmental psychology of Jean Piaget may be usefu in the designing of composition assignments.

Whether we think of composing as technical skill or as creative act, whether we se it as the mastering of underlying forms of problem-solving, or as the acquisition of co ventional rhetorical superstructures, whether we see composing as fundamentally concern with socialization, cooperation, or radicalization, we can agree, I should think, that composing should be a liberating activity. We may argue whether composing is an activi of self-expression, self-assertion, self-discovery or self-control; but we are agreed, think, that composing should be a means of liberating oneself from the provincialisms o time, circumstance, and self. As Roger Sale has put it, it should be "an action whereb the student learns who he is in relation to something outside himself."[1]

But how do we go about translating this ideal into practical assignments? How do we define what it is we ask of a student? What do we ask, and in the name of what do w ask it? In short, what exactly do we aim to accomplish, how do we expect it to happen, and how will we know when it has happened?

We all know how difficult it is to say what "works" in a composing class, and to say why it works. It's easier to say what doesn't work; harder, perhaps, to say why it doesn't work. Teaching writing is, we say, an art, an art that may begin as a quest fo a grail of quality in rhetoric and end as desperate invocation of writing that is interesting, or lively, anything to lighten the burden of all the paperwork. It is an empir ical skill, we say, a matter of individual style and sensibility; and finally, dependin on the class, the time of day, of year, of a life, we say it is a matter of temperament character, zeitgeist, the generation, the age. And so, rather than defining a rational for composition courses in general or for composing assignments individually, we subsid into our own particular provincialisms of time, circumstance, and self.

What is wanted, what is needed, is a way of naming what composing is that will all us to explain to ourselves, to each other, to anyone who cares to know, what it is, exactly, that we ask students to do and why it is, exactly, that we ask them to do that In this paper I want to suggest that the cognitive theory of the Swiss psychologist Jea Piaget offers terminology useful for defining what it is we want students to be able to do, useful for deciding how to shape assignments that will offer the students a chance to perform as we hope they may--assignments that will also give us the feedback we need to discover whether our plans have worked out.

For more than half a century Jean Piaget has been devising and refining a comprehensive theory of the origins and development of intelligence. He began as a biologist concerned with the ways organisms adapt themselves to the environment and the ways they organize the environment to suit themselves; the maintenance of the quality of life in the most elementary forms requires assimilating external reality to fit one's needs, an accomodating one's functions to fit the inescapable limitations of external reality. From the start Piaget was interested in the ways heredity (or nature) and environment (or nurture) worked together during the course of biological maturation to develop that which we choose to call intelligence. By analogy to biological processes, he theorized that mental (or intellectual, or cognitive) acts are acts of adaptation to, or organization of, the perceived environment, within the limitations of nature, nurture, maturation and experience.

The development of human intelligence proceeds in each of us according to a sequence and pattern; Piaget characterizes it according to the several stages through which it passes. We are all familiar with the concept of development by stages: Helmer Myklebust reminds us that language is acquired first as a recognition of objects and actions, then as a recognition that sounds symbolize some objects and actions (and that stage of development we have seen crystallized in a moment in THE MIRACLE WORKER when Helen Keller grasps that "everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought.")[2] Language is first understood as heard, then as spoken; first understood as read, and then as written. We are likewise familiar with the development of mathematical ability, from the stacking and lining up of blocks, to the counting and grouping of objects, to simple computations of sets and numbers, to the abstractions of algebra, to the conceptual formulations of trigonometry and the argumentation of geometry, and so on. And we recognize the developmental design of a traditional composition course that first asks the student to narrate, define, analyze; then perform operations of classification, comparison, contrast; and finally engage in structuring causes and effects, and logical argumentation.

Piaget identifies four main periods in the cognitive growth of the child. The first is that of Sensorimotor Development, the period of the logic of actions. It lasts from birth through the age of 18 months to 2 years. The second period he names that of Preoperational Thought, running from the end of the Sensorimotor Period (age 2) through about age 7. This leads to the Concrete Operations Period, which lasts until about age 11; finally there is a period of Formal Operations, starting around age 11 and lasting through adolescence, in which the final aspects of adult intelligence emerge.

During the initial Sensorimotor Period the child acquires a knowledge of objects and actions; he learns that he can move about in the world and initiate events. He learns that he is separate from his environment; he begins to learn about space, time, form. He can differentiate his actions between means and ends. By the age of 2 he is starting to represent symbolically objects and actions to himself, and to arrive at solutions to simple perceptual problems. But he is restricted to discovery by manipulation; consistent verbal language is just beginning.

From the age of roughly 2 through 7, in the Preoperational period, the child begins to use symbolic internal representation of his external world. Now he can predict the course of an event without actually having to do it. He begins to perform mental experiments, to answer the question, "What would happen if...?" At this stage, however, he does not form abstractions or generalizations that lead to concepts whose meanings are constant. During the Preoperational period intelligence becomes mediated through symbolic forms, but the Preoperational child tends to be egocentric, centering his internal representations around himself, unable to take another person's point of view, unable to learn by metnally picturing a scenario from another perspective. In addition, his thinking processes appear to be irreversible--once he has thought his way through, there is no retracing and conceiving of an alternative course.

In the period of Concrete Operations, starting at about age 7, the child develops the use of logical thought. He learns the rules of mental manipulation, of number, and space, of simple generalizations and abstractions. But his logic remains limited to concrete reasoning. He cannot apply logic to purely verbal or hypothetical situations. The Concrete Operational child's reasoning remains attached to empirical reality; his concept of what is possible is subordinated to his concept of what is real.

Finally, starting about the age of 11, the child's language powers become perfected; logical operations appear; that is, the manipulation not only of concepts but of propositions, arguments, implications. He can apply logical thought to complex verbal problems and hypothetical situations; he can operate on an argument independent of its content. He can construct not only necessary and real relations, but also formulate possible and impossible ones, probable and improbable ones; he can not only find answers, he can design them and select from imagined alternatives. For Piaget, formal operations is

> not so much this or that specific behavior as it is a general orientation...towards problem-solving, an orientation towards organizing data, isolating and controlling variables, towards the hypothetical, and towards logical justification and proof.[3]

Possibility no longer appears merely as an extension of an empirical reality or of actions actually performed; instead it is now reality that is subordinated to possibility.

The child's development from stage to stage occurs as the routines of assimilation and accomodation he has on hand to use in coming to terms with his world are found to be inadequate. Roughly speaking, assimilation is Piaget's term for the accumulating function of growth, the organizing and processing of new experience according to its coherence with what has gone before. Accomodation Piaget considers the diversifying function of change, the revising and alteration of acquired concepts so that the irreducible new data may be processed. The child develops new structures for assimilation and accomodation--he moves up a stage--when he finds himself confronted with the demand for new ways of processing information and formulating concepts.

These developmental changes have been intuited by Piaget from thousands of observations of children working on a variety of experimentally delimited cognitive tasks; they are defined in analogy to the mechanisms of biological adaptation. The full process of the development of intelligence is seen as a complex function of heredity, maturation, environment, and experience.

Peter Elbow, among others, reminds us that the main thing about these Piagetan stages is that "they must all be gone through in order. None may be skipped. A person is held back from attaining a certain stage if he hasn't completed or done justice to some previous stage (even though it may not show on the surface)."[4] Perhaps more important for our purposes, we must recognize that although the normal course of the development of intelligence is completed by the end of adolescence, thereafter any of us may perform a given task at any stage. And this, I think, is crucial.

Suppose, for example, and this is to oversimplify, that you were to depart from the top of a steep driveway on your daughter's skateboard. At once you are, for that behavior, operating at a Sensorimotor level; you are literally and in all seriousness learning all over again what it means to control events, what are the consequences of specific bodily movements. And so it is with any new task, though fortunately for most we are able to address our new situations at, say, the Concrete Operations level: how do we locate ourselves with the unknown here; what do we have to find out; how do these concepts relate to what we already know; what repertoires can be brought to bear? Or, at worst, at the Preoperational level: what are the terms of this? what is it called? how do you turn it off?

The point I am after here is this: even though all of us have completed our development into mature formal operations (we are all logical thinkers), there are situations, subjects, fields, tasks, problems, for which our performance will take place at what would appear to be an earlier stage of thinking. We apparently lack fundamental data, or elementary concepts, or conventional formulations. For some of us our behavior may be Preoperational (even Sensorimotor) when it comes to music, anthropology, organic chemistry, jump-starting a car, or organizing a day. For many of our students in our composition courses it seems safe to say, there is apparently a fundamental weakness when it comes to the behavior of composing words on a page, and that is what we should turn to now.

Ask yourself for a moment whether the following commentary might not describe the kind of writing problems you confront day after day: the writer

> repeatedly demonstrates a relative inability to take the role of the other person, that is, to see his own viewpoint as one of many possible, and to try to coordinate it with others.... He appears to make little real effort to adapt to the needs of his [reader]... he feels neither the compunction to justify his reasonings to others nor to look for possible contradictions in his logic; he finds it extremely difficult to treat his own thought processes as an object of thought...he is unable to reconstruct a chain of reasonings he has just passed through; he thinks, but he cannot think about his thinking.[5]

For me, at least, that seems to characterize the limits of thought in the mind I construe from most of the pages students hand me; yet what has just been summarized is Piaget's description of what he calls the ego-centrism of the Preoperational stage. Now I am not arguing by any means that an 18-year-old has only the mental development of an 8-year-old; but I think it is fair to say that very often 18-year-olds write as if they were thinking as 8-year-olds.

Let me be clear about this. I am not concerned here with what is stupidly called "Bonehead English" or with the "literacy gap." Indeed, the CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION recognized the paradox of our literacy problem in noting that "many of the so-called 'functional illiterates' we confront are in fact verbally gifted students who cannot organize their thoughts in writing." It is not enough, then, to announce that the problem is that these students just can't think, not enough to point to the high schools and ask, why didn't you teach them how to write. What is needed is a rationale for developing writing from the levels of Preoperational and Concrete Operational thought to writing that manages Formal Operations on a page.

Now since the level of thinking at which one chooses to address a given writing problem will vary with ability, interest, experience, and so on, assignments should be designed to be accessible to Preoperational, Concrete Operational, and Formal Operational thinking.[6] By offering this flexibility we will create the possibility of discovering at what stage a writer is able to perform with this task--the possibility, but not the certainty.

An assignment such as "Discuss the concept, Democracy" would be open to Preoperational responses of "Democracy is where...Democracy is when...Democracy is what we have here and they don't have there," and so on. It would be open to a Concrete Operations recitation of certitudes, such as "Democracy is government of the people, by the people, for the people"; and it would be open to an infinite variety of Formal Operations in political science, social philosophy, economic theory, satire, and so on. But this assignment includes no way of telling whether a writer is simply taking an easy way out, and no way for the writer to know if he is addressing the subject in a manner and at a level appropriate for the occasion and the audience.

So a second rubric could be this: each assignment should confront the writer with an idea or piece of experience, ask him to respond to it, and then ask him how he arrived at his response and what other responses he imagines could be made, by himself or someone else. In Robert Pirsig's ZEN AND THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE, you may recall, the narrator as composition teacher, at his wit's end, has everyone write all hour about the back of his thumb (as Sensorimotor an approach as thumbsucking, one supposes), and leaves it at that; then he gives the assignment, "What is Quality in thought and statement?"--a consideration so far out in Formal Operations its analysis is enough to break down that teacher's most sophisticated processes of thought. So it is not enough just to have concrete reference points or open questions. What is needed is an assignment that invites each student to connect an experience to an idea and then to grasp what it is he has done in making whatever connection he makes. The paper he writes is to be the metaphoric reenactment of that assimilation and accomodation, of that self-possession.

Here is an assignment I have used with a class that was reading Pirsig's book:

> Near the end of today's reading assignment (p. 244) Phaedrus is reported as having said, "In a sense it's the student's choice of Quality that defines him."
>
> Clearly at various places in this book different things are meant by that word Quality. Make up your mind what Phaedrus' statement about student choice may be said to mean in the place where it occurs.
>
> Describe a moment from your own experience that could be used to explain how a "choice of Quality" defined you as a student. As far as you can say, exactly what was the choice that you made? between what and what? Would you have, at the time, termed your choice a choice of Quality? did you, at the time, conceive of the choice as a matter of defining your self? Try to recall at what point, exactly, you came to think of your choice as something other than just a selection among alternatives.
>
> Write a paper confronting the issues as you see them in this process of recollection and evaluation of a moment of choice in your past.

What I am trying to do with this assignment, what I try to do with any writing assignment, is to ask the writer to locate himself at a level where he feels capable, in terms with which he feels comfortable, and then with a series of questions draw him on to more complex forms of thought and statement. I want him not only to focus on a piece of his own experience or an idea of his own and review it in the light of a specific issue or question, but also to examine the ways he used language in the presentation of that experience, and finally to focus on the way he performed the examination itself.

As a third rubric, then, every assignment is to be designed as a kind of diagnostic test; from what the writer produces in response to it, a teacher can discover where and how the student chose to locate himself with the problem, what terms he used to formulate the issues as he saw them, whether he is trading in "reality" and "certainty" or in possibility and point of view. One can then ask whether the writing manipulates conventional concepts and metaphors in conventional ways, or whether it designs alternative courses of actions and imagines varieties of meanings, interpretations, consequences. And having decided on such matters, the teacher can proceed to respond to the student in such a way as to invite him to a further stage of thinking and statement, to another formulation.

Finally, perhaps we can agree that any writing we call composing has to involve more than the reflection of an accumulated reality; in composing one is writing not just to reproduce data or to replicate historical argument or communicate conventional concepts. In composing one seeks to connect experiences and ideas, hypotheses and verifications, to conceive of variations, explore alternatives, to shape a being of one's own and be responsible both for that being and for the shaping of it.

Composing, I am suggesting, may be usefully defined as Piaget's Formal Operational Thought represented in tangible symbolic form. And in designing composing assignments we should seek to dramatize for every student the gap between what he feels, knows and thinks, and what he is able to arrange on a page. And should a student say to us, "I know what I want to say, but I don't know how to say it," we might do well to reply, "Precisely! And that is exactly the human predicament composing is meant to address. Now let's begin to address it."

NOTES

[1] Roger Sale, ON WRITING (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 55.

[2] Helen Keller, THE STORY OF MY LIFE (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1969), p. 34.

[3] John H. Flavell, THE DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY OF JEAN PIAGET (New York: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1963), p. 211.

[4] Peter Elbow, WRITING WITHOUT TEACHERS (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 44.

[5] Flavell, p. 156.

[6] This idea is a development of a suggestion found in "English Module 9" of the ADAPT Program, 1316 Seaton Hall, Univ. of Nebraska (unpublished).

CHILD WRITERS AND ADULT READERS: THE PARADOX OF THE COMPOSITION CLASS

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American mythology would have us believe that learning should be fun, but those of us who teach know that it is often not fun at all, and that in fact it can be quite painful. The tension generated by intense mental effort is only a small part of the current of feeling that can make the classroom experience an almost unbearable ordeal for student and teacher alike. When tensions within a social group remain unidentified and unresolved, it is natural for the members of the group to blame each other for those tensions, and all too often the purpose for which the group was formed can be forgotten and all its energies turned toward mutual recriminations. Most teachers are aware enough of basic psychological principles to understand and give special consideration to those students who are subjected to severe emotional stress in their private lives, but when students perform badly and such stresses are not apparent, we tend to revert to an older system of values that judges and assesses blame rather than explaining behavior. We say that Johnny is doing poor work because he is dumb, lazy, and willful; or we blame parents who don't care about their children, bad teaching at lower levels, a permissive society, television, etc. It is natural for students who are evaluated in such terms to defend themselves in kind. Education carried on at this level is poor education indeed, and the emotional damage it does to student and teacher can have lasting effect.

The teacher who wants to avoid having his classes become battlegrounds where fault is balanced against fault and accusations are the only means of communication will learn to pay as much attention to the emotional currents in his classes as he gives to the intellectual material he presents. Not all of the pressures felt in the classroom are negative, of course. Learning is hard work and naturally generates anxiety. Anxiety in a class can simply be a symptom that learning is taking place, and benign tensions, if recognized for what they are, can be used to further the goals of the course. Many negative forces in the classroom are transient--it's the week before a holiday, or the weather is about to change--and should not be given more importance than they deserve. Other emotional undercurrents derive from social forces outside the classroom and are, therefore, largely beyond the teacher's control. Some animosities are created by negative signals telegraphed unconsciously by the instructor. The conscientious teacher may be able to correct his behavior once he has traced the problem back to himself. It may not be possible to eliminate or even moderate every negative tension in a course, but the instructor who is sensitive to the emotional undercurrents in his classes can at least keep himself from expressing inappropriate resentment and guilt, and he can head off the angry, accusatory confrontations that are so poisonous to class morale.

The emotional problems for which the instructor should be most on the lookout are those that derive directly from the main objectives of the course. Such problems tend to be the most persistent and the most damaging. Not being aware of them can lead to serious tensions, since the more the teacher pushes toward course objectives, the more the class is likely to resist his efforts. The strong anger and resentment that are almost inevitably generated whenever an English teacher gives his students a writing assignment are symptoms of such a problem. Though every English class will be identified by its own complex mixture of positive and negative emotional pressures, this is one negative force which all will have in common. Every time we assign a paper we impose a psychological paradox upon our students and ourselves that all but insures that they will write badly, that we will respond to their poor performance with irritation and anger, that they will respond to the assignment and our grading of it with fear, resentment, and even hatred, and that whatever tensions existed in the class before will be increased by the assignment tenfold. Simply put, students have trouble writing, particularly in English courses, because everything in their previous experience and everything in the academic situation that provides the context for the assignment tells them that they should not write well. For an understanding of this strange conflict we must look carefully at a paradox that is inherent in the writing process.

To write prose that will involve and please the reader, we must write with authority; that is, we must write in the emotional mode of active, responsible adult. We must believe that we not only have the obligation, but the ability and the right to use language with clarity, power and a strong sense of purpose. We must write in a language so steady and sure it allows our reader to lapse comfortably into the emotional mode of passive, trusting child that is necessary if the reading process is to proceed. Our students' own intuitive knowledge of language, and everything we say in class and on their papers tell them that this is so, and yet the prose in most of the essays students write is weak and undirected; in other words it is language written by a child who expects everything he says to be restated much more effectively by an adult reader. And why shouldn't students write weak prose in the child rather than adult mode? Everything in their experience tells them that they are still children in the eyes of society and that the appropriate role for them is that of child-reader. If there must be a writer, then it should be their teacher who has the necessary authority to write for a public audience. Whenever we ask our students to write for us we place them in an emotional double bind that will inevitably produce strong feelings of anxiety, frustration, anger, and resentment. The basic authoritarian structure of American education, the fact that it is the instructor rather than the student who decides that a paper is to be written, remind the student of his immaturity and his inferior social position. And yet, when he acknowledges this position by writing weak, unassertive prose he is penalized. It is no wonder, then, that English is perhaps the most universally disliked of all subjects.

The psychological paradox we impose upon our students whenever we assign a paper can be more clearly understood if we look first at the paradox that confronts us when we sit down to grade it. No one ever completely outgrows the need to be a child. Though everyone embarrasses himself occasionally by behaving childishly at inappropriate times, this fact should not blind us to the need we all have to return periodically to the less-defended, more sensually open, more passive state of being that is characteristic of childhood. The hot shower in the morning, the mid-morning coffee break, the drink before dinner, the game of cards afterwards, television in the evening, the Saturday game of golf, puttering around the garden, all are ways we have of reconstituting ourselves through the renunciation of adult responsibilities and the therapeutic involvement in a more private, self-indulgent state of mind. Reading is one of the most complete and satisfying of the many ways we have of placing ourselves in touch with this child state.

Before we can allow ourselves the benefit of such restorative experiences, however, we must feel secure and relatively safe from the necessity of having to shift rapidly back into the mode of responsible adult. Because periodic regressions are important to one's emotional well-being we will feel anger and resentment, even if they are not consciously acknowledged, any time we are forced to return to the responsibilities of adulthood after we have settled comfortably into the mode of child. The anger that can be provoked by the ring of the telephone just as one is becoming involved in a good movie on television is an example of this psychological principle at work. Though some situations can be experienced as either adult or child, the basic process of deriving meaning from words on a page must take place in the mode of child. Before we can gain anything from all those black squiggles on the page, we must be willing to give up the active, critical state of mind required of us in our roles as adults, and we must take on the uncritical, accepting attitude that is natural for the learning child. If something prevents us from giving ourselves up to the thoughts and feelings of the author, the reading process cannot take place. The fact that it is normal to hesitate several times during the reading of the first few paragraphs of a work is an indication of the difficulty we have relinquishing control to another. Experience has taught us to mistrust our fellow man and we give ourselves over fully to an author only when we decide that he will not violate this trust. At no point will a competent writer subject his reader to an abrupt, unexpected shift in feeling, thought, or expression. In reading a work in which every word follows naturally and inexorably upon the previous one, the reader will find himself settling more and more deeply into the author's world until for a time the writer's language becomes the reader's own. At such times the reader will come to trust the writer very much as a child trusts a loving parent who patiently shows him the mysteries of the world. This feeling may explain the adoration readers often lavish upon favorite writers who may, in fact, be rather nasty people in their private lives.

None of this means that the writer cannot expose the reader to demanding and even threatening emotional and intellectual experiences, but at every point the reader must feel that the writer is adequately preparing him for the dangers to come, and that he will not abandon him just when things are most threatening. If at any point the writer proves himself untrustworthy through serious flaws in language, thought, or feeling, or a substantial shift in tone or perspective, the reader will abruptly withdraw from the relationship feeling hurt and angry. This does not mean, of course, that an active participation in the reading experience is unnatural. The sophisticated reader will often bring himself out of a book to allow for further thought or a more active application of the experience to his own life. When we do this, however, we are no longer in the passive, reading mode. As we think on our own and write notes in the margins we are functioning as adult-writer rather than child-reader. Though rewarding, reading in this involved way is much more tiring than the reading appropriate to murder mysteries and other popular literature. It is tiring in the way leisure reading is not because we are continually shifting from child to adult, adult to child. It is rewarding when similar shifts brought on by bad writing are irritating because they come as a willed, positive response to the author's power rather than as an unwanted break in involvement caused by the author's ineptness. Thus, in reading serious writing we can experience both the child's pleasure of unthinking involvement and the adult's pleasure of thoughtful analysis.

Language that prevents us from experiencing the first of these pleasures also takes the joy out of the second. When, as English instructors, we read a set of student papers, we must adopt the passive mode of child-reader, just as we must do when we read anything, but every time the student's grammar, punctuation, logic or rhetoric breaks down, we are suddenly thrown out of this mode and back into the mode of adult. Whenever we are forced out of the comfortable, reading stance of child and into the demanding, writing stance of adult-teacher, perhaps we are unconsciously reminded of the many occasions in childhood when we had to pretend to a maturity we did not feel; or it may be that we are reminded of those even more threatening situations in which we had to be the adult while our parents were being the children. Every error in a piece of writing reminds us of earlier conflicts, and since in student prose there can be a dozen things wrong in each sentence, it is no wonder that grading papers is such a frustrating, enraging, and exhausting experience. Nor is it surprising that we often make our students feel this frustration and anger when we return to class.

If there is justification for the pity we often feel for ourselves after a long session of paper grading, there is even better reason for us to feel pity for our students. For a piece of writing to involve a reader it must put him at his ease. It must move forward with an assurance and authority that tells the reader his expectations will e fulfilled, that he will not suddenly be set adrift upon an emotional or intellectual ea. For a writer to achieve this authority he must in fact feel authoritative. By efinition, however, the power in the classroom belongs not to the student, but the eacher. Every aspect of the academic situation emphasizes the teacher's status and bility and the student's impotence. The instructor is generally older than his stu- ents. He stands at the front of the class while his students sit before him in disci- lined rows. (Even if the class is arranged in a democratic circle, there is no doubt bout where the circle begins.) The instructor makes the assignments; he grades them; e generally does most of the talking. And when he talks, his knowledge and command of he language sets him apart from everyone else in the class. In every way, direct and ndirect, the student is made to feel that he is less capable and has fewer rights than is teacher

And yet if a student is to write a successful paper he must shift from the role of assive child-student-reader to that of active adult-instructor-writer. The situation s clearly absurd, and it is understandable why students respond to writing assignments ith a kind of baffled outrage. The game is not being played with a straight deck, and he student knows it. The paradox of having to teach one's teacher is like all those hildhood situations in which the child must somehow contrive to obey two contradictory ommands simultaneously. A good example of such a dilemma is the one in which the boy s forced to shoulder family responsibilities that are rightly his father's and is then unished for not showing his father the proper "respect." The two messages are: 1) do my work for me; (2) like and respect me even though I force you to handle res- onsibilities that are rightly mine. The student who writes an essay must in some way ccommodate similar contradictory messages: (1) you are still a child and you must rite this paper as I say it should be written or you will be punished; (2) you must rite this paper with such confidence, purpose, and control that I will be able to elax and be a child again, but don't let your success go to your head, for I will lways be the teacher and you will always be the student.

When confronted by double-binds it is natural for most people to respond as they id to similar dilemmas in childhood. Some students will simply retreat from the situ- tion by not coming to class or by not handing in the paper. Some will act out their onfusion by playing games with the assignment or by becoming hostile. Others will try o respond to both messages simultaneously. For example, by plagiarizing his essay the tudent fulfills the obligation to turn in something controlled by an authoritative oice, but by taking the piece from someone else he remains faithful to the role of assive child which he plays in almost all other academic situations. In the same way, y turning in a badly written paper he can remain child-reader while forcing his eacher to accept his proper role as adult-writer. All such strategies place the stu- ent in ambiguous relationships with both himself and his instructor and the results re anxiety, frustration, anger at the teacher, and further erosion of his own self- steem. Straddling the fence is, however, much less threatening for most students than eing in direct competition with their instructor, something that is inevitable if they dopt the authoritative voice necessary for good writing.

In every class there are a few students who are able occasionally to take on the oice of instructor and write an effective essay. And there is usually at least one tudent who can write consistently with the necessary control. Such students are the xceptions that prove the rule, however. At the college level they may be older indi- iduals who have already established an identity for themselves in adult society and ho are able to extend this sense of worth to their writing when they return to school. he younger student who writes well may be that rare person who has grown up in a ealthy environment that has continually let him know that he has the right to speak nd that he has something to say that others want to hear. And then there are those students who do not feel confident about anything else, but who do believe in their ability to use language effectively. Such students may pour all their need for self-esteem and all their hostility toward authority figures into their writing. For such people, writing can be a way of competing with adults and indirectly telling them off while simultaneously earning praise for their aggressiveness. Those people who have little self-esteem or those whose sense of self is identified with areas of life in which language is of secondary importance will find it difficult to make the imaginative leap from child-reader to adult-writer, and until they can, their writing will be ineffectual no matter how much they may learn about language and the writing process.

If it is true that the psychological paradox described here is a key determinant of why Johnny is such a bad writer, then we should not feel so guilty about the anger we start to notice somewhere around the tenth or fifteenth paper of every set we grade. At the same time we should not be so ready to accuse our students of laziness, gross ignorance, or callousness, nor should we be quite so quick to declare the intellectual and moral bankruptcy of our civilization. It may be true that the modern Johnny reads less, writes less, gets less attention at home, receives poorer instruction in the lower grades, watches too much television, and is, in general, the inheritor of a culture in decline, but he is also, along with his instructor, the victim of a classroom paradox with no identifiable villain. If Johnny and his instructor are in fact caught in such a paradox, then to acknowledge the fact and to make a clear evaluation of its impact should help us avoid uncalled-for indulgence in recriminations and guilt.

If the paradox outlined here is indeed inherent in the writing process, then the act of writing in a public language will always require the writer to confront the fact that the child-reader state which he finds most natural and most comfortable must be exchanged for the adult-writer mode if he is to reach the mind and feelings of another human being. Knowing this and trying to write as an adult while everything without and within tells you that you are still a child is truly a traumatic experience. The instructor who will himself face the problem squarely can be of immense help to his classes. In addition to avoiding self-righteous denunciations of his students and guilty criticisms of himself, there are a number of other things the teacher can do to moderate the negative effects of the adult writer-child reader paradox.

Students at all levels should be urged to write for themselves in the mode of child. Rather than denying that one's first instinct is to write as a child, students should be encouraged to recognize this fundamental fact. After they have become conscious of what it feels like to write as child, they can then be led to realize that though such writing is personally rewarding and even therapeutic, reading it will not be equally rewarding for someone else. From this point one can begin to demonstrate the importance of writing as adult. Since freewriting in the mode of child is easy and even fun, it is also a good way of breaking down the fear of writing created by previous unpleasant writing experiences. It demonstrates that what threatens us in writing is not language itself but the fear of humiliation that using language in a public mode causes us to feel.

The student's confidence in his ability to write for the world at large can be gradually increased if one teaches a simplified outline for an essay that allows the student to develop his own authoritative voice gradually in stages. Care should be taken, however, to avoid giving the impression that an authoritative voice can simply be memorized and artificially applied to a piece of writing. Students must learn that only the writer who truly believes in what he is saying and in his right and ability to say it can write convincingly. The need of the writer to feel confidence in his ability to command his material can also be used as justification for research and revision. The more contact one has with one's subject and the language natural to that subject the more authoritative one feels. The same argument also justifies allowing the student to pick his own topics whenever possible, since he will be more likely to write in an adult voice if he is familiar with his subject.

As much as possible, evaluation of student writing should be in positive rather than negative terms. This means that the instructor should concentrate on pointing out those places where the writing is strong and the student seems, at least for the moment, to believe what he is saying. Techniques that get students to evaluate their own work and that of fellow students help develop an awareness of the kind of prose that makes us feel comfortable with a writer. Self-evaluation also develops confidence in that it shows the student that he knows what effective language is even if he does not yet always use it himself. However, the principles outlined here argue against using works by professional writers as models. The traditional collection of high-powered essays by well-known authors only emphasizes the gulf that separates the student from the adult world he is struggling to join. Any technique that helps the student understand that the negative responses of others to our weak prose is an inevitable function of the language used and the natural needs of the reader and is not a purely subjective matter of personal likes and dislikes can also go a long way toward reducing the paranoia common to composition classes.

None of these techniques is new, of course, but their applicability to the adult writer-child reader paradox further attests to their soundness. Given the fact that the paradox is an inherent part of the writing process and the classroom situation, no new rhetorical system, no single teaching method or combination thereof can do anything more than alleviate its symptoms. Recognition of this fact should not lead us to despair, however; a good many of life's most valuable experiences involve unsolvable paradoxes. Most people are strong and flexible enough to face, work around, and even transcend life's basic absurdities. We become truly disturbed only when we feel ourselves the scapegoat for someone else's meanness. Whenever the English teacher assigns a paper without preparing his class in some way for the writing paradox of which he is the vehicle, then it is only natural that his students feel put upon. If, however, we can help them understand that the anxiety they feel when they write is natural and derives from an essential fact of the writing process itself rather than from their own inadequacies or our arbitrariness, then a course that is often too burdened by unresolved tensions for learning to take place can become meaningful and rewarding. We are all part child and part adult just as we are all part reader and part writer. Our effectiveness as teachers comes from our always being in touch with these two crucial facts and always being able to express the compassionate understanding such recognition brings.

FIRST GRADE CHILDREN CAN COMPOSE

Robin Kline, Kiva School, Scottsdale

Teaching composition in the first grade is not only possible but necessary if a teacher wishes to reach each child's fullest potential--to be able to read in first grade is only half the formula; to be able to read and write in first grade--that completes the formula for a complete Language Arts experience and lays the foundation for unlimited enrichment. I contend that: If a child can say it he can write it; if a child can hear it he can write it; if a child can think it he can write it; if a child can feel it he can write it; if a child can read it he can write it. He is involved in both cognitive and affective domains, and it becomes exciting to see what unfolds.

All this begins with a dialogue between teacher and children. It is the beginning of an adventure which starts the very first day of school as the teacher tells the children that this big and wonderful world will open up to them through stories both make-believe and real, nursery rhymes, poems, plays and songs, but first they must learn to do two things. Always I receive reading as one of the "two things," but usually I have to add the writing. Our dialogue continues: "Who has a favorite story?" "Tell me about it." "Who has a favorite nursery rhyme?" "Can you say it for the class?" "Tell me how that nursery rhyme got into the book you learned it from?" "Yes, someone wrote it down, and that person is called an author. Could you be an author and write things down for other people to read? If your Grandma or Grandpa write you a letter, are they authors? If I write this recipe down for you to bake:

MOUSE HOUSE

1 1/2 cakes fresh yeast
1 1/4 quarts water
4 1/2 pounds wheat flour
4 ounces sugar
1 ounce salt
5 ounces shortening

Directions: Let rise, punch down and let rise again. Bake 15 minutes at 425 degrees and 1 hour at 325 degrees.

Am I the author? No, I am not. This recipe was copied from the San Diego Zoo. Now we differentiate between what I write that comes from my own brain and what I copy that someone else has written. How about the "Three Billy Goats Gruff"? Did some author write it so we could read it and act it out as a play? Also, the song we sing every morning for the flag ceremony--The Star Spangled Banner--who wrote it?" I am building a bridge between reading and writing.

But to cross that bridge we must start with the alphabet which is made up of 26 magic letters that have a name and a sound and when used in a certain way will make words for us to use as we read and write. Only five (5) of those letters are called vowels, and at least one vowel has to be in every word there is or it isn't a word. All the other letters are called consonants, and they help the vowels make a word. The magic of combining these vowels and consonants to make words that we can read and write is what our adventure is all about.

Besides the alphabet the class also learns there are other symbols that help us as we read and write. They tell us to stop at the end of a sentence--a period (.). If we ask a question, we use a question mark (?). If I am excited and I shout "HELP!", I use an exclamation mark (!). Do you see those little marks on each side of the word "HELP!"? Those are called quotation marks and they only put between them what a person says. If I want to tell you that I will need a pencil, paper, and crayons to write and illustrate my story, I have to use commas (,) to list the tools I will use. And oh yes, if I am writing a long sentence and I need to stop and take a breath, I always put a comma (,) where I stop to take my breath.

First, the children must learn to read and write the alphabet. Then proceed with the long vowels because they "say" their own name. This procedure enables the child to attain a reading and writing vocabulary comparable to his spoken vocabulary. Each day whatever the child reads he will also write, first by tracing or copying, and then by taking dictation from the teacher. He starts with the sound, proceeds to the word, then to the sentence. As he develops his sentence structure, knowing that each sentence starts with a capital letter and ends with a period, he is developing a discipline that is laying a solid composition foundation.

Children should find and correct their own errors. Creativity can be discouraged by red pencilling. This too develops children's sense of responsibility; even if they only find one or two mistakes, their feeling of self-worth will be enhanced.

Every opportunity must be used to motivate the children. For example, if the long "ee" has already been introduced, "b" may be introduced so that a "Bee Story" will unfold:

A bee sees me.
A bee sees me eat pie.
A bee flies to the pie.
I see the bee.
I say, "Fly away, bee!"
The bee flies away.

A beginning, but from that the more aggressive child will expand, the less agressive child will have made "a beginning." The children must have an opportunity to write something everyday. It may be a special holiday to write about, or it may only be "Today is Monday and I will - - - - -" for a title. It may be windy, so - - "let's write about kites and what you would see if you were a tiny ladybug riding on a kite high in the sky." (I have had beautiful papers about seeing God.) Or a trip to the zoo will be an occasion to make paper bag puppets and write the dialogue for the animals. Children from around the world offer another opportunity for puppets along with making an illustrated backdrop plus their written description of the life of the child in his or her particular country. Illustrating and writing about the flags of America is a great favorite with the children. (I have the Children Around the World and Flags of America units written up if anyone desires them.) Also, I use the Sunday comic strip of "Peanuts." The children cut out the original words attributed to the various characters, and fill in their own words. This is an excellent way for them to express their feelings of frustration or joy as they identify with Charlie Brown or Lucy. Copying recipes for a cookbook also helps introduce math concepts; e.g. dozen eggs, quarts, pints, fractions (1/2 cup), and so on; this also helps with following directions in sequential order. (In CRICKET MAGAZINE, February, 1974, there is a recipe called "Oh My Darling Sugar Cookies" by Pauline Watson, and you mix the ingredients in a bowl to the tune of "Clementine"--children love it!)

Teachers tend to underestimate the abilities of their first grade children. I set the highest possible standards, and then stand ready to encourage, prod if need be, praise, even coax each individual child as he begins the most exciting adventure of his or her young life--the ability to read and write creatively at the first grade level.

WHEN SHALL WE THREE MEET AGAIN?

Gregory Cowan, Texas Tech University

My high school English class got to MACBETH and discovered we could get credit for recitation. Two friends and I seized upon the witches' scene--in fact, if there was anything *but* witches in MACBETH, you couldn't prove it by us. Our version ran strongly toward Halloween masks and fright wigs, rolled up pantslegs and bare feet. Stomping and splashing, we generally spread ourselves. Our teacher, Miss Hamm, put up with our fooling around, and we certainly did learn those lines.

As I worked on this paper, I was remembering that high school time. The title volunteered itself, unbidden. I was drawn to the notion of a threesome, and the idea that they may, or may not, meet again. There are, in fact, three aspects of writing; even though we English teachers spend most of our time on only two of them. The two we know so well are *ordering* and *polishing*. As teachers, we are really good in the arranging and organizing of ideas; we feel comfortable and competent explaining how to outline and how to make deliberate sequences. And in the polishing aspect we're good, too. We edit with sophistication, we know how to smooth out sentences, how to keep the words appropriate for the audience. We feel comfortable and competent doing the fine-grain finish work.

But what about that third aspect of writing? Ten years ago I asked Dick Ohmann what he thought was wrong with most composition texts. He replied, "They all presume that the student already has the thoughts. What happens if the student doesn't?" I was struck by what he said, by the strangeness of so much apparatus to assist in the ordering and polishing of thoughts, and so little, if anything, about how to "get" thoughts. Someone put it this way: "Tomorrow's illiterates will not be the people who can't read; they will be the people who haven't learned how to learn."

That hole in our class, that missing third, really isn't too surprising. Indeed, the gap is most predictable, given the tradition of rhetoric that carries at least as far back as Aristotle, and in the English language as far back as Wallace Douglas has traced it. Of course I refer to the Apollonian mode. At one time in history of western civilization there may well have been equal recognition and appreciation for the dark, surprising unpredictable part of human mentation--the Dionysian mode. But certainly from Aristotle on, it is the Apollonian, the logical, the polished and predictable mode that we favor. In the English curriculum, the Scotts schoolmasters had it all; there *may* have been a few Irish druids amongst the stones and trees, but by and large they weren't running the schools.

It would be ironic if the emphasis on orderliness and polish has had an inhibiting effect on the quality of thought, on the whole process of thinking. Yet I suspect it has. A schoolboard member with a background in retailing once said to me that composition class taught people how to gift-wrap but it ought to teach how to go shopping. That may be overstating things a bit, but what would a class look like, what could you see, if the aim were to "get" ideas, to go shopping, *as well as* to order and polish?

I once saw Bill Stafford teach poetry to 15 high school students he'd never seen before and would never see again. I think if I could reproduce that session on videotape, I'd have a proper objective correlative for what I mean by "thought-provoking." It was a special demonstration arranged by a publisher to promote a new textbook series. It was Thanksgiving day, in a tiled room lined with windows that looked out upon a busy street. The students were from different schools and so did not even know each other, and they were handed a book they'd never seen before. Bill and the students were in the middle of the room on folding chairs. On either side sat groups of 20 to 30 teachers. Observing. There was nothing essentially "cordial" about the setting.

Bill seemed to tolerate a certain amount of discomfort, perhaps because he's a poet and is used to tensions which most of us ignore. At any rate, he waded right in, asking the students in turn what they thought poetry was. One bright girl gave a well-rehearsed textbook definition. One rather surly boy growled that he wasn't sure what it was but was sure he didn't like it. There were all shades between. To each answer Bill seemed to listen intently. Often he'd summarize what a student had said, sometimes nod and say, "Yes, a lot of people think that," and sometimes ask a question in order to be sure he'd understood.

Slowly there was a noticeable shift in the attitude of the students. At the beginning they seemed to be looking for the "right" answer, and felt put-off and frustrated. I imagine that they were accustomed to classes that had an agenda and "right" answers, and imagine that they were surprised to find themselves in the midst of a real discussion. Certainly they looked mildly surprised. Here was an adult, speaking quietly, not disagreeing, yet carefully examining what "thoughts" the students had brought in that day, and offering them the chance to pick up some new ones. At the end of the hour, for example, there was a consensus that speeches like Kennedy's "Ich Bein Ein Berliner," King's "I Have A Dream," and Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" while in prose form and a matter of historical record are all examples of words used to alter reality, and that poetry, on the other hand, was the best effort of the poet to make language work on reality in a real way. Those are ideas which the students didn't have when that lesson began. Indeed, the ideas were raw and new to most of us observers. But Bill didn't "give" students the ideas. Indeed, he spoke very little. By listening carefully, by avoiding judgments, by appearing to have no agenda whatever, and by making every step as important as the final step, he provided a climate where thoughts can happen. And in front of 50 English teachers he provoked 15 young people to abandon what they "knew for sure" in pursuit of what they might find out.

That kind of idea-finding can and should be a prelude to writing, and writing can itself be a prelude to more thinking. A class session chock-full of new ideas and high-voltage stimulation is a joyful experience, but to be "basic-to-writing," those ideas must be written, not merely felt. Writing gets us in firmest touch with where our ideas live. And as surprising as the class discussions are, writing is even more surprising. Here I go into a writing, and out pops an idea I never knew I had. It takes some practice, "drafts" if you like, to learn how to catch ideas in writing. A lot of practice to show what makes good ideas good. A lot of courage to face a weak idea, to discard or qualify it, especially when you are very fond of it.

I later heard Bill Stafford say of his own teaching, "I try never to answer a question I haven't been asked." How often do students get semester-long answers to unasked questions about order and polish, when what's at stake is a point of development much less clearly defined, but every bit as crucial. The working-back-and-forth between good discussion/thinking and good writing is often the missing element in composition teaching. The situation reminds me of the two fellas from the country, one partially deaf, who went to hear a speech from a very famous intellectual. After listening for fifteen or twenty minutes the hard-of-hearing one asked the other, "What's he talking about?" The other answered, "He don't say." I think that every English teacher, myself included, has been taught that writing is primarily "statement," and our professional training has been addressed toward the organizing and polishing of that statement. But that's wrong. Or, rather, single minded. I think that every English teacher, myself included, needs and wants to learn more about the discovery of ideas, and how writing can do that.

To distinguish between the "discovery of ideas" and the "ordering and polishing of ideas" is not in any way to disparage the importance of the latter. Indeed, they are the final mark of rationality, most agreeable in their own right, and they also do indeed help clarify statements. But order and polish belong after the learnings, the discoveries, the ideas.

So, when shall we three meet again? "He don't say."

ON SHIBBOLETHS AND THE TEACHING OF COMPOSITION

R. W. Reising, Pembroke State University

Ours is the age of the transient shibboleth in education. Ten years ago the "in phrase" was "Relevance." Five years ago it was "Accountability." Today it's "Back to Basics." Changes in national priorities have repeatedly reverberated in the academic marketplace, where virtually every educator worth his weight in verbiage has ballyhooed the profundity of the slogan of the moment.

Yet shifting shibbolets should mislead no composition teacher. At the high school level--at any level, really--six principles must of necessity structure and direct the writing program. The best evidence and thinkers in the profession indicate that the validity of the six is undeniable. To abandon or overlook any or all of them, regardless of the catch phrase temporarily making the rounds, is to be myopic indeed:

1. *People learn to write by writing*. No amount of lecturing on composition, no amount of drilling on points of usage will improve writing skills; only practice--trial and error--will. Feedback and response are the key, as James Moffett says.[1] Once a student places words on paper, he needs only reaction--from his teacher, from his classmates, from anyone--to determine whether his communication has been effective. The choices for which he's opted can be deemed good, bad, or indifferent only if there is somebody, or a bunch of somebodies, to conclude "Yes, I like that phrase" or "Maybe *beautiful* would be a better word than *cool*" or "Ugh! You surely are cynical." Reading erudite essays on how to compose, circling *lie* rather than *lay*, placing one line under phrases and two under clauses won't improve anyone's facility with a pencil; only action and reaction will.

An especially promising technique for the classroom focuses on sentence-combining, an approach first publicized by two research reports from NCTE: John C. Mellon's TRANSFORMATIONAL SENTENCE-COMBINING: A METHOD FOR ENHANCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYNTACTIC FLUENCY IN ENGLISH COMPOSITION (1969) and Frank O'Hare's SENTENCE COMBINING: IMPROVING STUDENT WRITING WITHOUT FORMAL GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION (1973). William Strong's SENTENCE COMBINING: A COMPOSING BOOK, published by Random House in 1973, and O'Hare's SENTENCECRAFT: AN ELECTIVE COURSE IN WRITING, published by Ginn and Company in 1975, are both designed for use in the schools. Each moves from easy sentence-combining exercises to difficult ones, thus providing a sequence that is pedagogically as well as linguistically defensible. Equally important, each plunges the student-writer not into a study of language but into employment of it. Reaction alone remains to be provided, as a result of which the student-writer is bound to improve in writing prowess.

2. *Grammar study does not improve writing skills*. It belongs in the English curriculum, certainly. Anyone who says otherwise is utterly foolish. But studying any description, new or old, of how English works won't help a student with his writing proficiency. Perhaps it should, but it doesn't. Research is abundant as well as indisputable on the point. RESEARCH IN WRITTEN COMPOSITION, published twelve years ago by NCTE, and two more recent volumes, CREATIVE APPROACHES TO THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH: SECONDARY (Itasca, Illinois: Peacock Publishers, 1974) and EXPLORATIONS IN THE TEACHING OF SECONDARY ENGLISH (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1974), provide especially convincing proof that mastery of a grammatical system, even a linguistically based one, isn't tantamount to mastery of written discourse.

It bears repeating that grammar study richly deserves a prominent place in the curriculum. No student should emerge from his or her English studies without an awareness of and a respect for the machinery and complexities of the language. Yet grammar study is, at best, a poor substitute for writing experiences. In short, in the words of Michael F. Shugrue, the former Secretary for English of the prestigious Modern Language Association of America, "it should be introduced as a discipline in itself" and "no textbook which makes claims about the effect of grammar on writing...can be trusted."[2]

3. Writing can be fun. In fact, if students are to be expected to approach it zestfully, it had best be something other than pure pain. Unfortunately, for a lot of adolescents the five-hundred word essay is just that--pure pain--and an instructor who doesn't prepare his charges well for such an assignment is inviting nothing but insurrection or insanity (probably both). Other types of communication thus have a real place in the classroom: poetry, journals, photo essays, commercials, jokes, and a multitude of "unconventional" forms of composition (even graffiti!) provide an excellent prelude to or reinforcement for essay-writing skills.[3] They're all enjoyable, and they all teach adolescents something about controlling language--and that's what composition programs are supposed to do.

Among the most creative volumes to appear recently has enjoyment built into its every page. OBSERVING AND WRITING, written by George Hillocks, Jr., and published by NCTE in March of 1975, provides a fine blend of theory and practice, the latter consisting of fifteen activities designed to develop prose that thrives on details and concreteness. "The Spy Game," "The Bag Game," "The Shell Game"--activities of this ilk can't avoid leading to writing that is powerful as well as to classrooms that are fun-filled.

4. Every writing assignment carries with it not one but three teaching opportunities. Half-a-century ago, composition teachers gave all their energies to paper-grading. Once an assignment had been made, theirs was a simple life--waiting and evaluating, to put the point poetically. Not so with today's teachers, however. They realize that, like baseball players, they get three strikes, one as good as another. They have an opportunity to teach writing skills before, during, and after the composition process. Pre-writing and laboratory sessions can be just as productive, they realize, as time spent with the completed products. James R. Squire, formerly Executive Secretary for NCTE and now a ranking official with Ginn and Company, hits the nail on the head when he argues that the wise teacher does not neglect either "what happens before pupils write...." or laboratory situations, "allowing the teacher time to move around the class, conferring with individuals as a need arises, helping each class member with his own individual problems, at the time when he most needs help, at the time when he is actually composing."[4]

No teacher should be deluded, however. Providing profitable pre-writing and laboratory experiences is far from the easiest pedagogical assignment imaginable. The latter are especially taxing, doubtless. Flitting from student to student while a group of thirty or thirty-five are composing, or struggling to compose, makes heavy demands on both brain and body. A teacher can soon tire. But the rewards of working thirty seconds with one student, a minute with a second, and two minutes with a third are immeasurable. Mini-conferences at the very time students are grappling to crystallize and record their thoughts are doubtless among the most important conferences that can take place in the English classroom; certainly, despite the wear and tear on a teacher's tootsies and cranium, they cannot be omitted from the composition program that strives for success.

5. A lot of red-penciling does not lead to a lot of writing improvement. Phlebotomy belongs to centuries past, not to the current one. Humanity's in, bloodletting's out--and for the best of reasons. Research provides irrefutable evidence that the

intensive evaluation of a composition, the "marking of every error and the writing of detailed comments," does nothing other than submerge the writer "in a sea of particulars. It forces him to attend to all his missteps at once."[5] Like Rome, good writers aren't built in a day; and, unlike that beautiful city, they have sensitive egos that can easily be damaged. Composition teachers must, therefore, exercise restraint. A handful of well-chosen comments, at least a couple of them ego-building, can go a lot further toward developing writing mastery than can a horde of red scribblings scattered in every nook and crevice of a writer's noblest effort.[6]

6. Effective writing programs have objectives. Without them there is bound to be little or no direction to the instruction and activities--and student frustration looms as a real possibility. What Hillocks sees as necessary for Electives English programs is no less vital for composition programs: "objectives must be valid in terms of theories of the subject matter, appropriate to the interests and abilities of the students involved, and clear enough to permit the teacher to evaluate the effectiveness of the instruction."[7] Not every student is destined to be a prose master; yet, thanks to sensible and sequentially ordered objectives, none needs to feel so inept with a pencil that he cringes every time the word composition reaches his ears.

A resource developed by the Division of Languages of the North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction can be useful to the teacher who does indeed sense that "composition" is a dirty word in his or her classroom. Published in November of 1974, A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT: "LEARNING EXPERIENCES" IN ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS, K-12 provides enlightened and enlightening guidance for every grade level. Not only does it identify, in very specific terms, what students should learn, but it also suggests strategies for reaching those objectives. While not dictatorial or constraining, it outlines in far from general or ethereal terms a sequence of experiences that can lead to enrichment and improvement in all facets of the language arts/English program, including composition.

Regardless of the year or the decade, the writing teacher who wants to get "Back to Basics," as well as to remain "Relevant" and "Accountable," will refuse to forsake or minimize the six points just discussed. Because they represent the key to effective instruction, he or she will realize that no shibboleth is destined ever to veil or replace them.

NOTES

[1] James Moffett, TEACHING THE UNIVERSE OF DISCOURSE (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), pp. 188-210.

[2] Michael F. Shugrue, "Information Retrieval and the Changing Curriculum," ENGLISH AND READING IN A CHANGING WORLD (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1972), pp. 154-163.

[3] For a useful list of "some neglected forms of composition," see Stephen N. Judy, EXPLORATIONS IN THE TEACHING OF SECONDARY ENGLISH (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1974), pp. 91-92.

[4] James R. Squire, quoted in "A New Look at the Teacher of Writing," REPORT OF THE FOURTEENTH YALE CONFERENCE ON THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH, April 5-6, 1968.

[5] J. Stephen Sherwin, FOUR PROBLEMS IN TEACHING ENGLISH: A CRITIQUE OF RESEARCH (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1969), pp. 163-167.

[6] For a full description of one desirable paper-evaluation technique, see R. W. Reising, "Controlling the Bleeding," COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION, XXIV (February, 1973), pp. 43-44.

[7] George Hillocks, Jr., "The English Teacher as Curriculum Maker," ENGLISH EDUCATION, V (April/May, 1974), pp. 238-248.

ORIGINAL SIN AND THE TEACHING OF COMPOSITION

Margaret and John Fleming, University of Arizona

Dr. Jonathan Sindammer, the Puritan preacher, faced his congregation every Sunday from behind his pulpit or lectern. Here he read and expounded the Word to those who often could not read, and certainly could not interpret, for themselves. Dr. Sindhammer's sermons were lengthy, so he required the services of a beadle, who moved among the pews, rapping with his stick anyone whose attention strayed or who appeared to be falling asleep.

Dr. Sindammer's religion was stern. For hours at a time he exhorted his congregation to eschew evil, emphasizing the universality of original sin and God's righteous wrath toward unredeemed sinners. His favorite texts were the Ten Commandments and the grimmer prophetic writings from the Old Testament.

Dr. Sindammer's influence has been pervasive in American life, and not least in education, though perhaps less obvious there than elsewhere. Even today, more than 200 years after Dr. Sindammer flourished, our educational institutions are in many ways models of his church and his theology.

Take the classroom. Traditionally the teacher's desk (or lectern) is in front of the room with the students' desks facing it, aligned in rigid rows like pews. The teacher assumes the role of preacher, reading and interpreting "the word" for those incapable of doing it themselves. Usually the teacher also serves as beadle, moving among the pews to prevent anyone from being inattentive to the lesson. This kind of classroom arrangement assumes that learning takes place in only one direction, an assumption that many educators appear to be comfortable with. In our local institution of higher learning, for instance, the seats in most classrooms are bolted down to the floor, reinforcing that assumption and making the lecture the only feasible type of instruction. Ironically, though, in the secondary classrooms, where the desks are almost always movable, they are usually arranged in the same rigid rows, facing the teacher. And although few secondary teachers do much lecturing, what passes for discussion is all too often thirty separate catechisms.

Or take the teaching of composition. Here especially an underlying Calvinistic assumption persists. Dr. Sindammer's descendant, Fran Faultfinder, teaches writing by exhorting students at length to avoid errors, emphasizing such "thou shalt nots" as the following:

Thou shalt not use contractions.
Thou shalt not use "I."
Thou shalt not misspell.
Thou shalt not allow any sentence fragments.

After a day--or a week--or a semester--of such exhortation and drill, Fran gives out a composition assignment, and the students dutifully wrestle with it, eventually handing in their papers to be "corrected." The word suggests that these papers, like the members of Dr. Sindammer's congregation, are conceived to be sinful, born tainted, and doomed from the start. Fran corrects them with red ink, symbolic of the blood that must be shed for redemption. The sinful papers are redeemed by the acceptance of this vicarious sacrifice by the teacher/Christ-figure.

When grading compositions, the teacher assumes yet another role, that of God-figure, damning with F's those papers beyond redemption and saving with A's only "the elect." Students recognize the element of fatalism involved and realize that, try as they will, many of their papers will inevitably be damned. Yet since only the teacher/God knows which ones will ultimately be saved, it behooves everyone to keep on trying.

This is of course an extreme representation--both of Puritan religion and of composition teaching. Yet there is enough truth in it to suggest that we should examine some of our assumptions. Pride in our heritage can certainly be a good thing, as our bicentennial year has emphasized. But instead of looking backward for models to the most negative aspects of Calvinism, why not look forward to the millenium that is also an important part of our religious heritage?

The millenial classroom will have flexibility in arrangement. The seats may sometimes be arranged all facing front--perhaps for a film or other A-V presentation, seldom for a lecture. More often they will be arranged in a circle so that students can see each other's faces during discussion, not just the teacher's face and the backs of other students' heads. Or the seats may be arranged around tables or in small groups to facilitate reading and criticism of each other's papers. The teacher, Lynn Lerner, will sit at the back, or in the circle, or will move among the groups, participating in discussions and giving help and encouragement. Learning will take place in many directions.

The millenial spirit in composition teaching will be universalist, assuming that all students can write, that they all have voices worthy of being heard, and that they should be called upon to express themselves in a variety of modes. Instead of always following the sermon as a model and writing moralistic expository prose, they will also write skits, spoofs, limericks, haiku. They will invent situations and respond to them, adopting various personae. They will keep journals and write letters to the editors. They will enjoy learning how language can be manipulated for fun and profit. They will realize that writing can sharpen their perceptions and increase their self-awareness. Writing will be an end in itself, not a means of redemption from linguistic original sin.

In the criticism of writing, Lynn Lerner's voice will be only one among many, for the teacher will write, as well as the students, and they will all read aloud and criticize each other's writing. The emphasis will be positive as often as, or more often than, negative. Instead of the teacher's prescribing "thou shalt not," Lynn and the other learners will ask a writer such questions as "Why did you choose this word?" "What effect were you after?" or "Who is your intended audience?" They may comment, "I like the way you made that transition," or "That image really grabs me." They may suggest ways to improve clarity and consistency or to avoid cliches and redundancy. By analyzing their own and others' writing, they will begin to develop pride in their increasing mastery of the craft of composition.

Dr. Sindammer, in his emphasis on the prophets of doom, has bequeathed to us a stereotype of the Old Testament as an embodiment of religious negativism. We have forgotten, or are unaware of, prophets like Micah, who said, "He hath shown thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" The millenial composition teacher will be such a positive guide, saying, in effect, "You have shown me, O students, what is good, and what is required of me but to write honestly, and to love language, and to work humbly with my class?"

CONCERNING MYTHS OF GRAMMAR BEFORE COMPOSITION

Brian Barabé, Westwood High School, Mesa, Arizona

The idea (as stated not by its proponents but by its opponents) that "grammar" eed not be stressed in composition classes has enjoyed a life of sorts in the past ecade. It is now in danger of death by strangulation, by teacher indifference, by alnutrition (lack of alternatives to "traditional" grammar), by taxpayer misundertanding, by school district "in depth" studies and restudies, and by school board ecrees to "return to the basics." I speak as one who completed an English and educaion degree in the mid 60's and has been teaching since.

While parent and teacher groups speak of taking a stand in support of "the asics," I think it is time for those who oppose such a stand to make clear what they ropose. (Although I do not know what basics I am opposed to, I have been honored in y own department as the young teacher most hostile to them. It's like the honor of eing the first to contract a formerly undiscovered cancer.) What I propose is nothng new. It can be found in increasing detail in ENGLISH JOURNAL, COLLEGE ENGLISH, and OLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION articles since the publication of Chomsky's SYNACTIC STRUCTURES in 1957. The proposal is that students be confronted with a variety f interesting writing tasks. (If "interesting" begs the question, I further beg the uestion by calling your attention to the fine ideas suggested elsewhere in this ssue.) In my own teaching "interesting writing" does not frequently mean the producion of stories, poems, and plays--although there have been these--but often is the xamination, evaluation, and exposition of things around us: the drool on babies' hins, the staggering run of an old woman in a crosswalk as the light turns yellow gainst her, the tricky wording of a cigarette ad, the irony in the lyrics of a song, he meaning of a short story's "weird," as the kids say, ending. All of these we call hought.

To repeat, students should be confronted with interesting writing tasks--weekly. his means two or three days of writing each week in nearly all English classes under hatever rubric--literature, media, or composition. Students should be reminded of nd required to use the standard conventions--correct punctuation and spelling. Where een necessary, this may include practices or exercises in "grammar books"--WARRINER'S or instance. Please notice, however, that spelling and punctuation are not matters f grammar, but convention. That they are by tradition presented in "grammar books" laces a semantic burden on all of us in the profession.

Grammar in an analytical language such as ours is almost entirely a matter of orphology and word order (syntax). (I have it from the 1959 WEBSTER'S COLLEGIATE: The science treating of the classes of words, their inflections, and their syntactial relations and functions...."). Our grammar concerns then are mostly about word rder; English has some inflections, and the word order determines classes of words. How many sailors are housed in that houseboat? *House* is a noun?) Our word order oncerns are thus the creation of parallel phrases and sentences, the various uses of ependent clauses and qualifying phrases, and the placement of all clauses and phrases or rhetorical effect.

These concerns should *never* include memorizing the definition of, say, a compound entence. Do you know a kid who can't, when it fits his need, write a compound senence? I know a lot of kids who don't get the comma before the *and*, *but*, *or*, *so*, or *or* of compound sentences, so I teach them that convention. I do not confuse them or aste valuable time with the arbitrary abstraction of compound sentence. ("Compound sentence" is an abstraction by and hopefully for linguists. I do not study kinesics or aerodynamics to throw a Frisbee. The inventor probably did.)

I will concede that discussion of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs may help in some composition classes. Such discussion can be limited to a few days and should not include the memorizing of definitions. Rather such discussion can be aimed at helping kids discover specific and colorful words (ran--sprinted; pink--glowing magenta; old tree--decrepit sycamore). But now we come back to the idea that composition is thought. Thus the teaching of composition is the teaching of how to think and how to use one's senses, the nurturing of seedling perception, the guidance of sapling analysis, the cross-pollination called comparison and contrast, and the grafting of foreign points of view--remembering that "foreign" for a fifteen-year-old is something as common as Kennedy's inaugural address or one pithy sentence from Mark Twain.

BASICS: A CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

Jan A. Guffin, North Central High School, Indianapolis, Indiana

In San Diego, in Milwaukee, in Chicago--wherever I have gone this year, I have been bombarded by the notion that we are indeed moving back to the basics. The professional journals bulge with the issue: one will suggest how far we've gone astray, another will wonder what we're getting back to, and still another will outline for us how to get there. And indeed, no self-respecting English teacher will deny the discouraging frequency with which he faces hastily conceived, poorly constructed, carelessly written papers; even teachers of accelerated students bemoan the need for more rigorous teaching and closer monitoring in the composition strands of their courses.[1] And judging from what one observes at publishers' displays, we are headed posthaste back to the path of clear and accurate expression.

Recently, I have given my attention to the implications of this trend for the teaching of composition. I am skeptical of what "back to basics" could mean for both veteran and beginning teachers. To the veteran teacher, for example, the phrase is likely to have a pejorative meaning--"subject-verb agreement," "dangling modifiers," and "sentence fragments"--based on his own early experiences as a teacher of composition. No doubt he went to his first teaching assignment in composition as we all did, with virtually no training in the subject itself, and no doubt he started the way we all did--with a handbook of exercises, which, he deduced, would produce good writers if practiced assiduously. Now, having liberated himself from the dangerous oversimplification of such an approach, he will possess a wider frame of reference, hopefully one which will include such considerations as the nature of the composing process, the variations of correct expression relative to audience, the need for a variety of writing experiences for most students, the use of multiple strategies for teaching a single concept, the needs of the exceptional student, etc. In short, after a number of years of haphazard but conscientious experimentation and evaluation, he will feel less need for the security of a textbook in his teaching, more need to develop his course in relation to the needs he diagnoses among his students.

Such growth, being largely coincidental with one's teaching duties, occurs slowly and is characterized by uncertainty. However much one may feel that he has discovered a workable ploy for teaching a narrative, expository, descriptive, or argumentative discourse, or however much he may attempt to keep in reasonable perspective his demand for mechanical accuracy, he still will lack the security often suggested by research findings, for in the teaching of composition, there is little such data to be found. Thus, suddenly to thrust at this teacher the demand that he get "back" to the skills which matter may be to thrust him "backward" in his growth as a teacher. Surely we do not want this teacher to revert simply to his handbook drills.

The "back to basics" movement is even more illogical for the beginning teacher. We can hardly expect him to go back to where he has never been. And where he has been is of great importance here. Chances are good that he has been in a methods class where he may or may not have touched on the subject of teaching composition. Chances are good also that he has been in one or two writing courses where he has had his own writing evaluated but has never been asked to consider teaching someone else to write. And finally, chances are good that when he is given his first teaching assignment in composition, he will assume that one assigns "papers" as his professor did at the university. If because of our own uncertainty about the basics or because of our need for expediency we encourage the handbook syndrome in such teachers, we will merely perpetuate the teaching pattern which we have taken such pains to liberate ourselves from in the first place.

The question which I *think* has been raised most often by the "back to basics" movement, "What are the basics of acceptable expression?" is not the question which I *feel* should be raised by the movement, which is "What are the basics of effective composition teaching and learning?" In the remainder of my discussion, I hope to show how the second question subsumes the first.

What leads the beginning composition teacher to the handbook is his need for quantifiable information. Consider, for example, how we equip the beginning teacher with a literary nomenclature which will enable him to teach a short story, a play, or a novel. Although the risk is great that he will oversimplify or exaggerate the analysis of a literary work, he has at his disposal at least a number of tools to use in discussing the matter at hand with his students. He can refer to plot development, figurative language, symbolism, irony, etc. Not so in composition. At most he will mention to his students such things as "style," "organization," "point of view," or "mechanics," but if pressed for a definition of these components, he is likely to discover that he has affected a knowledge which he does not possess. I would propose, then, that we define all those aspects of expression which characterize a piece of writing, rehearse them as a specific nomenclature, share them with out students, and regard them as basic to any composition course. My list of such constituents is as follows:

1. Subject analysis: focus, thesis, re-focus
2. Substance
3. Audience
4. Length-proportion
5. Point of view
    - a. narrative
        1. first person
        2. omniscient
        3. partially omniscient
    - b. expository
        1. physical
        2. psychological
        3. rhetorical
            - a. person
            - b. number
            - c. tense
            - d. case
            - e. mood
            - f. voice
            - g. tone
6. Handling of the substance
    - a. mode
        1. narration
        2. description
        3. exposition
        4. argument
    - b. method
        1. details
        2. examples
        3. comparison
        4. cause/effect
        5. definition
    - c. movement
        1. chronological
        2. spatial
        3. logical
            - a. deductive
            - b. inductive
7. Structure
8. Coherence
9. Unity
10. Mechanics (spelling, punctuation, grammar, usage)

STYLE

RHETORIC

Although the list should be largely self-explanatory, two or three observations should be made concerning its overall meaning and interpretation. The reader will notice, for example, that all of the constituents have been bracketed toward the emergence of style and rhetoric. Style is here intended to mean the imprint of the writer's self on what he writes; rhetoric, the fullest and most calculated development of thought. Both style and rhetoric in this casedepend on the conscious orchestration of all the constituents.

The interpretation of such a list is also important in relation to a "back to basics" trend. For example, whereas one student may have a good conceptual understanding of most of these aspects of composition yet lack mechanical expertise, another may write perfectly clean papers mechanically but fail to understand the ramifications of the rhetorical point of view. If both the teacher and the student in each case have at their disposal a transactional language for identifying such problems, they may mutually decide which "basics" deserve the most attention.

In many cases, the needs of the individual student are reflected generally among those of the peer group; characteristically, beginning students have trouble with the analysis of a subject or the structure of a paper, and the teacher may find that the needs of a class are general enough to permit large-group instruction for such concepts. With the kind of awareness level which such a scheme of constituents provides, however, he is able to move with relative ease beyond the large-group level to work with students who demonstrate exceptional needs.

I do not mean to suggest slavish devotion to such a list; to expect students to concentrate on every constitutent in every paper they write is as foolish as evaluating a paper solely on the basis of its mechanical correctness.

I would suggest, however, that the judicious use of such material will produce more critical readers and more discriminating writers, not only by providing a common language for the teacher and the student to use in describing a piece of writing, thus eliminating the confusion which comes from obscure teacher comments such as "good organization but you need to work on style," but also by increasing the awareness level of students, thus enabling them to see a piece of writing as more than something which has an introduction, body, and conclusion. I would consider such advantages not as basics "to get back to" but as basics "to achieve."

NOTES

[1] At Advanced Placement Conferences recently held at the University of Michigan and at Kenyon College, teachers of accelerated students identified this as a high-priority item in maintaining their course standards.

[2] For a somewhat fuller explanation of this list see Jan A. Guffin, "Writing," in CREATIVE APPROACHES TO THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH: SECONDARY, edited by R. Baird Shuman (Itasca, Ill.: F.E. Peacock Publishers, 1974), 133-185.

ONE WAY TO VIEW THE WRITING PROCESS

Jim Grimord, Academy School, Glastonbury, Connecticut

Teaching contemporary composition is teaching a rather complex process. This process begins with the students' awareness of self and environment and does not end until the students have effectively communicated a message about self or environment to a receptive audience. The composition teacher should emphasize the steps through which a product evolves and not the product alone. I trust this method of teaching composition not only because so many educators and writers espouse it, but also because I've tried it, and it works.

The writer's first step in the process is sensing an audience. The teacher's job is to make the writing experience real for the student-authors; prove to them that real people are anxious to listen to their stories and share their experiences. The teacher and class members can be the primary audience, but extended audiences shouldn't be ignored. Parents and relatives, other teachers or significant adults, younger children newspaper editors and public figures are ready audiences. A variety of interesting and well written pieces from newspapers, newsstand magazines, professional journals, textbooks, fiction and nonfiction books should be read to and by students. Study the selection of audience in each piece. Examine how that selection influences the author' mood, style, form, and even choice of words. I intend to make wider use of this particular activity to reinforce the importance of audience selection, a basic step in the process.

Just as basic is the selection of a topic. A formidable task, especially if the process is new to the students. But it isn't difficult to start them talking about themselves and their experiences; to allow them to share and explore commonalities. I encourage conversation and discussion at the earliest stages of the process, and even evoke additional comments with the open-ended questioning technique.

"How did you become interested in model building?" "When did you learn to ski?" "What is so exciting about the Bronx Zoo?" I explain that this oral method of sharing information is interesting but time consuming, and perhaps a portion of the audience is bored with model building, skiing, or hearing about the Bronx Zoo. More experiences can be shared with a greater portion of the total audience if the same information is written.

What information about a topic should the student use? What exactly does the student know about the topic? The art of brainstorming is conveniently taught at this point. The method works best with the entire class the first few times. A student too a trip to the Bronx Zoo and needs to write about the experience. I would write the words "BRONX ZOO" on the board. I would ask the entire class, "What do any of you know about the Bronx Zoo?" Students may begin to respond individually, "It's really big," o "I think it's in New York." Once they see that all their responses are recorded on the board, students eagerly suggest more details. "It's real dirty," "There aren't any goo animals there." I list all responses on the board without embarrassing anyone who may have given a false bit of information. The author can clearly see where this audience stands in regards to the Bronx Zoo. What do they know about it? What should they know that they do not? What does the potential author know about the zoo, and what must be learned? The teacher becomes a resource person, helping the author research the topic if necessary, eliminating any innaccurate facts. Brainstorming works well in small groups, or even individually, once the student sees the purpose--to develop a basic lis of facts, a springboard from which to develop specific details and write a composition.

At this point in the process outlining can also be taught or reinforced. The emphasis is on helping students clarify and organize their ideas on the topic. If the student wants to write about the trip to the zoo, the outline will have quite different headings than if the piece is about the zoo itself. Many times the student cannot see where the focus is without the outline. Subtopic A. will either read "Leaving the house," or "The first things we saw at the zoo." This focus is important early in the work.

A more specific list can naturally develop from the brainstorming activity. "What animals are there?" How many elephants did you see?" "How tall was the giraffe?" The focus shifts to detail--chronological order of events, names, places, statements, colors, sizes, shapes and smells are necessarily clarified for the reader. With this second listing the author should feel ready to begin a draft, tying all the information together.

The next two steps in the process, selecting a form and writing a first draft, are interchangeable, and will vary from student to student. Mary is so anxious to tell about the zoo that she begins to flail away in a story form in an effort to complete a piece of writing. This form may or may not work with her selected audience. Bill, on the other hand, knows what he wants to say about the zoo, but he doesn't know how to say it. He needs a form to follow which will work with his readers. The teacher has the responsibility, at various grade levels, to teach students how and when to use such forms as the narrative story, the character sketch, the various types of letters and poems, the feature story, or the many other possibilities. This teaching must be a continuing effort, since all the writing forms cannot possibly be taught during the first few weeks of school. Once again the teacher becomes a resource person, directing students to try this form or that, teaching individually or in groups. At this point in the writing process it is important to allow students' writing to flow. Form is important, as the students will discover, but it should not impede the writing of a first draft.

When the student completes a first draft, the audience plays a key role. Audiences are for reviewing writing, not correcting it. If the student can view the work in this light, the audience--including the teacher--becomes less responsible for the final product, and the author assumes more of that responsibility. Word selection and placement are most important during this stage of the process. In addition, language precision must be stressed at this point. Errors in tense, faulty logic, misplaced modifiers should be noted here, and retaught if necessary. The author becomes aware of these mechanical faults in the piece, and, providing he/she has the knowledge to rectify them, will rework the piece and mend these faults. Clearly this is the author's responsibility, but under no circumstances should negative comments overshadow positive ones. I discuss the merits of the piece first, then I suggest mechanical corrections on the basis that they will clarify the writing.

I notice some students becoming frustrated and bored during the rewriting stages. Rather than let a student give up on a piece, I encourage her/him to put it into the portfolio to "incubate." Another piece can be started, or the frustrated student may go on to another classroom task. However, at some point during the first few months the student must follow through on one piece, to the final step of evaluation by an audience. Without this follow-through the teacher may be teaching the author to create for creation's sake, and not be teaching the complete writing process.

After one or more reviews, and some diligent rewriting, the student is ready to publish a final draft. Insistence upon neatness and correctness is important, but need not be heavyhanded. I find that threats of lower grades for ink smudges and other types of silly coercions aren't needed for the conscientious students and don't matter to those who have begrudgingly advanced to this point. The student will feel the value of the piece, providing the reviews have stressed the positive. The student's pride should carry the product to an excellent conclusion.

The final step in the process, the evaluation, is the most difficult step for the teacher, or at least for me. The objective factors of evaluation speak for themselves. Spelling errors and incorrect usage cannot go unmentioned. While these types of errors and incorrect usage cannot go unmentioned. While these types of errors should be minimal, noting them should not make the student feel that she/he is either lazy or a bad writer. I lean toward the subjective factors in evaluation. How much total time has the student put into this piece? How much of herself or himself went into the selection of a topic, the researching or exploring of that topic, the struggling with specific words, the input into others' work, the conference time with the teacher or other members of the audience? In short, I ask how sincere is this work, not how correct and interesting it is to me. Students who accept their own responsibilities during the process usually earn A's and B's. These just rewards encourage students to take an active part in the writing process.

This process cannot, and should not, be taught isolated from other classroom situations. Vocabulary activities, grammatical instruction, project work, and every other aspect of language arts teaching should be given equal time at appropriate grade levels, but using this process as a basic approach to teaching writing makes the teaching of language arts easier, and more interesting for the student-author.

WRITING MODULES: AN APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENTAL COMPOSITION

Michael F. O'Hear, West Virginia State College

The English Language Skills Lab at West Virginia State College runs a two-credit course in basic reading, writing and study skills for students who are entering college with deficiencies in any or all of these skill areas. Two years ago the lab staff developed a system of modular instruction both as an attempt to deal with the variety of skill levels possessed by our students and as a way of assuring that our students attained competencies demanded by content instructors. Since the modules were first used, they have been revised two times to correct observed weaknesses.

As a result of use of the modules, we have found that student performance levels have improved significantly for those who have completed the various modules.

In this article I would like to share some of the theoretical and practical content of our modules which we feel has contributed to student success in using them.

The writing modules are multi-level. Each module contains as instructional level (Level 1), an exercise level (Level 2), and an application level (Level 3). Within each level, the materials used represent a variety of approaches (programs, audio or video tapes, books) and sources. Each contains material on a variety of reading levels to aid students of all kinds. Readability levels of materials are listed in an instructor's manual accompanying the modules so that students working with given material do not know whether its level is any more advanced than the material used by other students.

Each level contains a post-test made up by the lab staff to measure the specific skill learned at that level. Students are asked to do this test without using books or other aids. However, they are usually allowed to make corrections on their papers with the help of books if they need to do so. An exception to the rule about using aids during a test is the post-test for Level 3. In this test the student is encouraged to use a checklist provided in the module to help in his/her writing. We feel that using available aids is an important element for students to learn because, with the exception of in-class themes, their future writing will be done in circumstances that will allow them to use whatever aids they feel necessary.

The modules make use of homemade instructional materials and exercises as well as canned professional material. We have made our own materials whenever the canned material did not seem suited to the particular needs of our students. For instance, we have found that published instructional material seldom fits the needs of our low level developmental students because it is not simple enough. We have frequently found it necessary to write our own materials for working with these students. Most of our homemade material is on videotape. These tapes are short (five to seven minutes), concentrate on one grammar principle each, and are filled with graphics.

On no occasion have we copied published material in our modules. Aside from possible legal complications, we feel there are several important reasons for avoiding this practice. First, the human contact in the individualized setting is increased when students must approach an instructor to get needed materials. This contact increases the opportunity for discussing student progress and problems. Second, the interaction of the student with different material alleviates the chance of student boredom, which could easily result when students use the same material all semester.

The modules are written in as light a tone as the material will allow. Jokes and asides are frequent as are hand drawn cartoon figures who comment on the content throughout. We have tried to defeat expectations of a dull typewritten page by doing some pages in script, by varying the spacing on different pages, and by including some pages with a few words or with no words at all. This procedure adds to the interest content of the material and gives a student a feeling of progress. An average module is thirty-five to fifty pages long. The many short pages give the student the sensation of moving swiftly from beginning to end of the assigned material.

To encourage retention of material from one module to another, we have arranged that ten to twenty percent of student grades on a given module depend on applying in the module post-test (Level 3) skills previously learned. Because grades of A or B depend to a large extent on carryover of learning, students do pay more attention to using learned skills.

While individualized instruction is the key to the modular approach, students are frequently referred back to their instructors for progress checks. Books used in the modules are stamped at intervals with: STOP -- SEE INSTRUCTOR. Additionally, module activities are readily adaptable to small group work whenever an instructor has several students working on the same skill at the same time.

At this point, let us look at a specific module--one we call "Comma Confidence"--to see how students proceed through the various activities.

Initial placement in the modules is done through a writing sample students must supply during the orientation period. Topics for this writing sample focus on problem-solving situations. The student whose writing indicates a need for work on commas is given a brief, lab-developed comma test to indicate whether the comma problem is a rule problem or an application problem, whether the student will need to work through the entire module or only go through a part of it. Now the student is ready to begin work. The student's reading test score determines which activities are assigned.

The student is given a copy of the comma module and directed to read through until he/she reaches the beginning of Level 1. On the first page of the module is a brief section on the importance of the comma: Figure A

"Commas are funny looking, but they can kill you.

If you use too many, someone's sure to notice. How do you think your, boss would feel, if, you sent, him/her a letter, or a memo, filled, with, unneeded commas, like this, one? Some bosses right here in the good old Kanawha Valley have told their employees to learn the mechanics of writing or else....

or

Do you think that your customers would really be impressed if you sent out letters filled with unneeded commas?

By not using commas where needed, you may give English teachers fits.

BUT WHAT IS WORSE

The person or persons you're writing to can really get confused by punctuation problems in your writing.

Don't let this happen!

There is a bright side.

By using punctuation right where it is needed, you can become a punctuation whiz.

You can astound your boss, your customers, your teachers, maybe - even yourself.

No tricks.

By the time you complete this module, you too can conquer commas.

You can see your progress.

.....by knowing when to use commas
.....by recognizing and correcting faulty comma usage with 90% accuracy!

and

.....by really using commas as needed 90% of the time."

Within limits, material selection is geared to the student's needs and abilities. At varying levels, the material for Level 1 includes: a lab videotape "Commas--Where," which attempts to break down comma usage rules into three broad groupings; a programmed text; a handbook; a lab-written overview of comma usage, and a book of detailed advice on the most common comma usage problem. Though students are generally assigned initial materials, each material listed in the module is described in detail to allow students to find out what the material they are using is all about and to aid them in picking alternate materials if they do not like the material assigned:

Level 1

Objective

After completing Level 1, you will be able to list and define at least five comma usage rules,

and

You will write a sentence to illustrate each rule listed.

Learning activities:

Do one or more of the following activities to learn the rules for using commas.

1. Get your instructor to play for you the videotape "Commas--Where." This tape discusses the two main reasons for using commas: sense and tradition. Take notes on what is said so that you'll be able to use commas when needed."

2. Get from your instructor a copy of Writing Skills I. Read and answer questions on your own paper from pages 104-109. This is a programmed book. First, write your own answer to each question. The answers appear on a gray panel beneath the question. Then check to see if you're right. When you finish with Writing Skills I, repeat the process with Writing Skills II, pp. 99-114. If you have any problems, consult with your instructor. Continue going over these books until you understand what commas are all about.

3. If you like to have a lot of rules stated in some fairly clear language, get The Writing Clinic from your instructor. Turn to page 132 and read through the section on commas, which goes to page 137. Do the exercises on your own paper. Answers will be found on page 139 of the book.

After completing work with an appropriate material, students are directed to confer with the instructor before proceeding to the Level 1 post-test. When the student feels ready to take the post-test, he/she does so, goes over test results with the instructor, and then writes down the number of points received. If the test results are unsatisfactory, the student, with the help of the instructor, chooses a new material for work on comma rules. Most students complete Level 1 satisfactorily the first time.

Level 2 gives the student practice in identifying punctuation problems in several exercises. The exercise sentences are taken directly from student papers submitted in previous semesters. The grammar in these sentences has been cleaned up; only punctuation problems remain. Here is a sample exercise at level 2:

B

Add punctuation where it is needed.

1. I got out of my car locked it and started walking toward a gas station.

2. Having a baby is really worth all the waiting pain and worrying you have to go through.

3. I am the father of three children named Patty Sherry and Clifford.

4. By today's standards they are excellent well-mannered kids.

5. Patty comes home from school goes to her room and gets her homework.

6. The attendant pointed to a sign which said: No Checks No Credit No Exceptions.

7. I was driving lost control of my car and hit a tree.

There are a total of ten exercises in Level 2. Six exercises deal with specific comma problems (restrictive/nonrestrictive elements, introductory elements, etc.). The last four exercises contain a mixed bag of comma problems. Each exercise contains two parts. The first part has sentences with misused commas. The second part has unpunctuated sentences in which the student must supply missing commas. No sentence has more than one error to correct.

In Level 2, students work only on the type of comma problem that they have. If a student is having trouble only with restrictive elements, then that student will not work on commas with introductory clauses. The student will get credit for all exercises skipped as a reward for already knowing the material covered in these exercises.

All exercises are self-correctional. Answers appear in the module on the page after the exercise. However, students keep their instructor appraised of their work status by filling in information on a progress chart. They are also directed to consult with the instructor before taking the Level 2 post-test. Students still having comma problems after completing relevant exercises and the post-test may need to work with additional handout exercises, or they may agree with their instructor on an alternate means of working with commas. Successful completion of Level 2 means the student is ready for the application level (Level 3).

Level 3 is the writing level. No student has successfully mastered commas until this mastery is shown in a writing assignment. Level 3 includes a list of possible writing assignments and a checklist for using the comma. Students are asked to write a paper of a specified minimum length. By using the comma checklist, students act as their own editors. No paper reaches the instructor until this editing is completed. In writing their papers, students can also refer to books and exercises used previously. Although several topics for themes are listed in the module, students are free to choose their own topics. They are even free to bring in a paper they are submitting in another course. The important thing is that the students turn in papers in which commas are used correctly at least ninety percent of the time. To gain credit for the module, students must continue to write until they reach that level.

Also significant in Level 3 is the carryover from modules previously worked on. In order to facilitate the continued use of what has been learned, students must apply skills from previous modules throughout the course. In the comma module, ten out of thirty-five points given for Level 3 are for skill retention. Whether a student gets an A or a B, or whether he/she even exits the module successfully, depends on retention of learned skills.

Use of the writing modules has led to greater student success in skills the students have worked on during the semester. Further, the writing modules have decreased housekeeping chores and have increased time available for instructor interaction with students. Students seem to enjoy working with them. We feel that the modules provide us with a strong base for our developmental program.

REMEDIAL WRITING: AN ACT OF INVOLVEMENT

Hortense Sarot, Hunter College, City University of New York

Writing is an acquired skill, and just as with other skills--learning a sport or playing an instrument--it must be learned through involvement. So why do teachers continue to teach writing by talking about it or by having students practice isolated drills and exercises?

Most writing classes include little time for the actual process of writing. Essays are assigned to be done at home, edited by the teacher at home, and returned to the students for a revised draft to be done at home. The cycle may be repeated several times before the paper is acceptable, by which time both the student and the teacher are bored with the topic and weary of the process. This totally unreal situation for learning writing is compounded by giving the student a final examination essay to be written in class.

Since we know that the most direct method for learning a skill is the continual opportunity to use that skill with a teacher close by for guidance, it seems foolish to waste any class meeting with remedial students on the teacher-oriented lecture approach. My experience has shown me that a peer-group approach solves many problems that have plagued me in teaching writing in the past. Students' writing is more vital, their work is turned in on time. Students accept and apply criticism more readily from their peers than from a teacher. Peer-grouping provides an honest audience--sympathetic, appreciative, critical students. Because the audience is their peer group, students are more motivated to do as well as possible. They accept the strengths and weaknesses of their writing that students point out to them, and they rarely repeat immature grammatical and punctuation errors when other students correct them. In addition, students relax more, learn about each other, and share and expand on ideas among themselves. They form a group cohesiveness which contributes to the learning ambience. And, there are fewer absences when the students become involved in their peer groups because each student feels necessary.

In a class using peer-grouping, students can choose the topics, arrange deadlines, and discuss the best ways to reach the goals of the course. Although it is difficult at first to relinquish all that power and to resist those inventive writing situations that have been successful, it is interesting to find that students write better essays when they choose the topics and that they will submit them on time when they arrange the deadlines.

From the topics chosen students must prepare a thesis statement that contains a controlling idea. For argumentation, students will need a thesis statement that is controversial. As these statements are formulated, the teacher becomes a resource who will either accept or reject the statement, giving reasons and suggestions during the writing process. For some students, the thesis statement is not difficult, and once they have the idea, they are able to help others in the group who are having difficulty. With each step in the writing process, the student is involved in writing rather than listening to how it should be done.

Peer-grouping requires a great deal of planning and an enormous amount of work during each class meeting. It often requires many more conference hours than most instructors are accustomed to. However, it eliminates the endless task of grading papers at home. It eliminates the need for those imaginative writing situations that we strain for in order to get students to find something to say. (The students pick issues that are important to them because in some way they affect their lives, and they find plenty

) say about these issues.) It eliminates the need for just the right way to tell a :udent that his writing is simplistic, unimportant, boring, unworthwhile. The other :udents will let him know. With careful planning, students go through each step of ne writing process, prewriting, writing, editing, and revising. They receive help on ne spot as they wrestle with the problems of unity and coherence. They receive imme-iate feedback on their writing. And best of all, directed writing practice takes lace at every meeting.

At an early meeting with the class, I discuss the strategy of peer-grouping. ogether we arrange groups of four so that strangers are put into each group. No riends or lovers because they tend to be easy with each other. We decide how many apers will be required from each group, from each student. We design the roles and esignate titles for these roles. We plan individual conference schedules for formal valuation of each student's progress. We agree on deadlines. We discuss the reasons or criticism, the kinds of criticism, and realize that there is positive as well as egative reinforcement. We assign the roles to students that will be kept for four eeks. These roles might include "Coordinators" who distribute, collect, and record ne activities; "Specialists" who isolate the problems and find solutions; "Observers" no interact with the class-at-large; "Clarifiers" who arrange the sequence of tasks. ne titles and their functions are as varied as the imagination permits. The goal is) involve each student quickly and each group effectively. Roles may be adjusted to tudent needs. For example, the role of "Interpreter" might be given to a roving mem-er of the class who is available for consultation rather than a permanent member of a roup. The role may be used for someone who has a unique problem at the time--an nability to write with sentence variety or an inability to deal with abstract ideas. uch a student is assigned independent study, is seen in conference to ascertain his ontrol of the skill, and then is asked to circulate among the groups to demonstrate his skill when it seems needed. Because the acquisition of the skill is reinforced by eaching it, I frequently assign students who have gained control of a particular skill) teach it to someone who needs it. Another example of the flexibility of titles and oles is the "Judge." Weak writers may be assigned the role of Judge and asked to pre-are a model essay from each group for class discussion. From the edit sheet that I ave prepared, they select examples of well-written essays and present their strengths nd weaknesses with well-defined reasons to the other students. Of course, it is ecessary to prepare an essay for presentation with such a student to show him what to ook for. Stronger writers may be "Editors" who help weaker writers to revise their ssays.

From the diagnostic essays written during one of the early class meetings, I ssess the writing problems of each student, write a brief profile for instant recall n conferences, and prepare the homework assignments from the text. These assignments re turned in to me. We call this independent study because it is different for each tudent. Independent study covers the grammatical and mechanical problems; peer-groups over the rhetoric and structure of written standard English. I arrange the work to be overed in units and give each unit an editorial task number. There are seven editor-al tasks to complete in a semester. As an example, Editorial Task #6--"Does the essay how interconnections?" is in conjunction with a chapter of the text that discusses ransitional words and phrases, repetition of key words and phrases, parallelism, pro-oun reference, and what I call "movement and idea bridges." Each student receives a opy of the Editorial Guidesheet and uses the editorial tasks he learns from that oint on to discuss and to edit a student's paper. In conference we look at these emarks and revisions to see if anything more could have been done to help in the writ-ng of the next draft. If the revisions are inaccurate or too incomplete, I make a otation to call the editor of that paper to an immediate conference.

Almost all the lesson plans that I prepared in the past and liked are used. I keep a small folder of these in class and replenish it when necessary. I draw on this modest collection during conferences, sometimes to assign an exercise, at other times to test a student's skill. The biggest difference is that in place of lecturing to the entire group at one time, I am addressing one student at a time. I see about twelve students during each hour of class. The time that I spend varies from three to ten minutes, and I have additional conferences which add approximately three hours of time to each three hours of a class. In the old days, I used to spend at least six additional hours at home, carefully revising and writing out suggestions for improvement along with the usual positive reinforcement to avoid discouraging the writer. And I have always had the dreadful feeling that they were never read anyway.

Since students select two topics for each unit, a great deal of writing goes on. Seldom do I hear that a topic is boring as I used to when I selected them. In fact, boredom is kept at a minimum; the continuous involvement is an antidote for boredom. As proof of this, once when I was unexpectedly absent, the class went on as if I were there, and at the next class meeting, the students brought me up to date on what they had accomplished. Peer-grouping makes the writing teacher's work more demanding, more precise. The classroom becomes a workshop for students and in this student-centered learning atmosphere, I know that the student is reaping greater benefits than the teacher-centered classroom ever demonstrated for me.

A PERSONALIZED WRITING COURSE: HOW WE STARTED ONE, AND WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

Lynne B. Kitchens and Sherry L. Reames, Tuskegee Institute

Two years ago we decided that something had to be done about our English composition classes. The better students were bored and frustrated, the underprepared students were lost and frustrated, and the instructors were at wit's end and frustrated. The traditionally taught freshman composition course--i.e., three lectures per week, assigned readings (often not read or, if read, not comprehended), discussions (carried on mainly by the same two students), and themes (usually stacked up to be graded over a weekend)--was simply not working for the student population which we serve.

The most striking characteristic of this student population is its diversity. Since there are no remedial writing courses at Tuskegee Institute, all freshmen are enrolled in the same composition course. The average freshman is black, comes from a middle to low income family in the South, and has an SAT verbal score of around 330. But we also have students from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean countries as well as from other parts of the United States. Some freshmen come from extraordinarily good high schools, boast SAT scores in the 600's, and possess a high degree of cultural and verbal sophistication. At the other extreme--but in the same classroom--are poorly prepared, high-risk students who tend to come from low income backgrounds and to have SAT verbal scores below 250. Experience has shown us that this type of student is a poor reader,[1] feels insecure about expressing himself in writing, thinks he has little to write about, and has seldom or never been required to revise any of his written work until it has reached an acceptable standard of literacy. How could a composition class possibly be geared to meet the needs of this wide range of students?

This was the dilemma we faced in the spring of 1974--a dilemma all too common in other schools--when inspiration came to us in the form of an article, "Goodbye, Teacher...," by Fred S. Keller.[2] Keller described an instructional method (PSI or personalized system of instruction) which seemed to suggest solutions to most of our problems.[3] Originally developed for a psychology course, Keller's method involved several innovations: (1) The course content is broken up into small sequential units. (2) The specific skill or knowledge required for each unit is clearly stated, and a procedure for achieving it is spelled out. (3) A student must demonstrate genuine mastery of each unit (perfection, in Keller's classes) before proceeding to the next one. (4) A student is expected to work independently: class attendance is not required. (5) Each student progresses through the units at his own pace; as soon as he feels ready to take a test on a given unit, he may do so. (6) Student proctors are used to administer unit tests and provide individual help. (7) A student immediately learns the outcome of his unit test. If he passes it, he is allowed to go on to the next unit. (8) If he fails a unit test, he discusses it with a proctor, restudies the material, and tries again. The student is not stigmatized by failure but instead is encouraged to continue working until he has achieved mastery.

Some of Keller's innovations we knew we could not adopt. For example, a 100% mastery level in English composition is impossible to define, let alone demand. Moreover, we were on our own, with no special amenities such as budgets, testing centers, or release time for planning and preparation. Most importantly, we could not hire a student proctor for every 10 students enrolled, as Keller advocated; we would have to play most of the proctors' role ourselves. But despite all these obstacles we could not resist the appeal of a method which might help us reach students at all levels of ability and preparation. We first tried it in the fall of 1974, in three sections of first-semester composition. In the four semesters since then, we have won a few converts among our colleagues and learned a great deal about both the difficulties and the rewards of using PSI methods to teach writing. We are not experts yet, but we believe that our experience may provide help and encouragement to other English teachers who would like to try adapting PSI to meet the circumstances in their own classrooms.

1. Preparation of materials. Our first task was to find a text that was compatible with PSI. Fortunately, one came into our hands that seemed to have just what we were looking for: WRITER'S WORKSHOP, by Robert Frew, Richard Guches, and Robert Mehaffy (Palo Alto: Peek Publications, 1972), which emphasizes one writing skill at a time, working systematically from individual sentences through various kinds of paragraphs to complete essays. Armed with this text, a course description, and multiple versions of the first few unit tests, we thought we were prepared for our first semester. Now, four semesters and countless after-work hours later, we realize how wrong we were. We gradually discovered that neither WRITER'S WORKSHOP nor anything else currently in print was an ideal text for our course and our students. The first few units--like most units in published materials we have seen--turned out to be too long and complicated; we have broken them up into smaller and more manageable steps. Instead of one long unit on sentence structure, e.g., we now have four units on the different types of sentences. We have found it necessary to supplement and clarify the text with study guides for each unit (see Appendix A). We have gradually added review units and adapted other published materials (or written new ones from scratch), both to fill in such gaps in the text as outlining and to meet students' specific problems in grammar and organization. By last semester we ourselves were supplying about half the study materials the students used (see Appendix B), as well as all the tests.

2. Amount of writing required. Since we feel that our students can most effectively improve their writing skills by writing and writing and editing and editing, we soon realized that the units alone did not provide sufficient practice. We therefore began to require that each student submit a weekly "journal entry"--a one to two-page paper on any subject. We read these carefully (and sometimes mark them) but assign no grades. Some of the better ones are read to the class, hopefully providing both inspiration and positive reinforcement. Students are thus placed in a relatively pressure-free writing situation; they have the opportunity to demonstrate what they are learning in the course, and most discover that they do have something to write about. We are also supplied with a continual stream of written work which helps us recognize students' writing problems and the topics they are interested in writing about.

3. Rules. One of the major questions we had to face was management. A flexible course is not easily reconciled with an inflexible semester system. The absence of class attendance requirements and deadlines in our course created problems for students who had a tendency to procrastinate, since course grades are determined by the number of units successfully completed by the end of a semester (see Appendix B). We therefore began to deviate a little more from Keller's system by requiring class attendance (at least for the first half of the term) and to suggest target dates for the completion of certain units, with frequent reminders to those students who seemed to need them.

4. Classroom sessions. With each student working at his own pace on his own materials, we are free to manage the classroom from a new perspective: instead of standing behind a lectern and talking to the mass at a distance, we move through the classroom, talking to individuals or to small groups. We are advisers rather than adversaries. The students know that they will receive exactly the grades they earn; we are simply there to help them. Several different kinds of activities go on during a class session--mini-lectures, test taking, discussion of tests, individual study--and these same activities continue after class during office hours. To keep track of individual progress, we keep a file for each student which contains all his written work and a record of units passed.

5. Student tutors. Although we are still far from reaching Keller's 1/10 proctor-student ratio, we have found that the few proctors we can use have helped us to reach more students during a class period. Moreover, we have effectively enlisted students who have mastered a given unit to help classmates who are having trouble with it. This both benefits the learner and provides the student-teacher with a particularly effective kind of reinforcement.

After four semesters' experience with personalized instruction, we find it difficult to imagine teaching composition any other way. We stay busy. While there are no long lectures to prepare and usually no stacks of papers to take home, there are objectives to be determined and materials to be prepared (hopefully well ahead of time). A class session is both exhilarating and exhausting for us, since so many activities are going on at once; we have had to become proficient in on-the-spot diagnosis and evaluation of writing. Probably the greatest reward is the new relationship with our students: social, economic, cultural, and ethnic differences are virtually forgotten because we are engaged in a mutual effort to achieve a well-defined goal.

Although we are not yet reaching all the members of our diverse classroom population, the personalized course seems to benefit more of them than the traditional course ever did. Nearly every student's writing shows some improvement in the course of a semester, and attitudes often change a great deal as well. Given individual attention and the opportunity to progress at their own pace, some students who have always done poorly in English find a new incentive to succeed. Average students, required to strive toward genuine mastery of each writing task, often take new pride in their work. Even the outstanding students seem to learn more in the personalized course, where they are challenged to examine and perfect their own writing and to help teach others. We are convinced that when students accept the responsibility for their own learning, they take an important step toward maturity and self-confidence as well as better writing.

APPENDIX A
A sample study guide
STEP TWO: THE COMPOUND SENTENCE

Now that you know what a simple sentence is, you are ready to learn how to combine two (or more) simple sentences or independent clauses into a compound sentence. This skill is worth mastering. Simple sentences can be very effective. But you don't want to overdo them. After a while, simple sentences become boring. They can make your writing sound choppy. They can even start to sound like a second grade textbook. Doesn't this paragraph sound that way? Well-written compound sentences can help to add variety and smoothness to your writing.

Objectives: When you have completed Step 2, you will be able to:

1. recognize a compound sentence when you see one.
2. write two kinds of compound sentences (those with a comma and a conjunction and those with a semicolon).
3. choose appropriate connective words to show the logical relationships between your sentences.
4. punctuate both simple and compound sentences correctly.

Procedure: Read Unit One, lesson 2, in WRITER'S WORKSHOP (pages 1-7 through 1-14), checking your answers as you go and asking for help as needed.

You may take the test on this step as soon as you are sure you have mastered the material.

Points to watch out for: Don't let the organization of this lesson confuse you. First you will be shown how to join two related simple sentences with a comma and a conjunction:

We went for a ride, but the car ran out of gas.

Next you will be shown that a semicolon can replace the comma and the conjunction.

We went for a ride; the car ran out of gas.

When connective words are introduced on page 1-11, they sound more complicated than they really are. The same adverbs and adverb phrases have three names (conjunctive adverbs, transitional words, and interrupters), depending upon where they are placed in the sentence. And it is nothing but their placement that determines the punctuation that is needed. Study the following examples:

1. When one of these words interrupts a sentence, two commas are needed to set it off from the rest of the sentence.

We went for a ride. The car, however, ran out of gas.

2. When one of these words begins a sentence, one comma is obviously enough to set it off from everything else.

We went for a ride. However, the car ran out of gas.

3. When you join these two simple sentences to make a compound sentence, nothing happens except that a semicolon replaces the period.

We went for a ride; however, the car ran out of gas.

In this last example the semicolon is required, NOT because of the however, but because this is a compound sentence without an and, yet, but, or, or for between the clauses--that is, because of the same rule you learned on pages 1-10 and 1-11.

REMEMBER, semicolons are used only between the clauses in compound sentences.

APPENDIX B

Course outline (as of Spring, 1976) - excerpt

SCHEDULE FOR THE SEMESTER: (The dates in the right hand column are for your guidance. If you expect to complete 16 units during the semester--the minimum for a C--you should pace yourself so that you finish these steps on or close to the date indicated. If you are working for a B or an A, you should pace yourself to finish more quickly.) WW = WRITER'S WORKSHOP; H = handout

Sentence Structure

Step 1	The Simple Sentence WW	Friday, Jan. 16
Step 2	The Compound Sentence WW	
Step 3	The Complex Sentence WW	
Step 4	Sentence Improvements WW	
Step 5	Review of Steps 1-4	Friday, Jan. 30

Paragraph Structure

Step 6	The Thesis Statement WW and H	
Step 7	Writing the Introductory Paragraph H	
Step 8	Revising the Introductory Paragraph WW	Feb. 13
Step 9	Outlining H	
Step 10	Writing the Body Paragraph WW	Feb. 25
Step 11	Additional Types of Body Paragraphs WW	
Step 12	Writing a Short Essay (Review of 6-11)	

(Note: Anyone who has not yet begun Step 12 by March 5 is not progressing fast enough and will receive a midterm unsatisfactory grade report).

Special Skills

Step 13	Using the Library H	
Step 14	Writing a Summary H	
Step 15	Taking Essay Tests H	

The Major Expository Patterns

Step 16	Process Analysis (Methods) H	Apr. 30
Step 17	Classification H	
Step 18	Comparison/contrast H	
Step 19	Causal Analysis H	
Step 20	Definition H	

GRADING: Each step will be graded on a pass-fail basis. Outstanding work will receive the grade of pass plus. Your final grade will depend on the number of steps you have completed by the end of the semester, on the amount and quality of your written work, and on successful completion of a final examination.

1. A student who completes all 20 steps, does outstanding work on most of them, turns in all journal entries on time, and writes a good final examination, will receive an A.
2. For a B, 18 steps, some outstanding work, all journal entires, and a satisfactory final examination.
3. For a C, 16 steps, most journal entires, and a satisfactory final.
4. The grade of D will be given only to those students who are very close to completing the requirements for a C.

NOTES

[1] Tuskegee Institute students who take the Diagnostic Reading Test and fall within the 50th percentile of the local 1975-76 norms are in the 5th percentile nationally. Reading ability in a given class may vary by as much as eleven grade levels. (Local norms were measured by the Reading Clinic, Tuskegee Institute, 1975. National norms are from the Committee on Diagnostic Reading Tests, Inc., DIAGNOSTIC READING TESTS-NORMS, revised and reprinted, Mountain Home, N.C., 1967).

[2] JOURNAL OF APPLIED BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS, I, 1 (Spring, 1968), 78-89.

[3] More information on PSI may be obtained from the Center for Personalized Instruction, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057.

LITERACY IN WRITTEN EXPRESSION: ELUSIVE DREAM OR REALISTIC GOAL?

Richard L. Graves, Auburn University

The steady stream of complaints about the teaching of composition, complaints which we have been hearing for years, has in recent times turned into a roaring avalanche. Critics from both without and within the profession are asking, with good reason, "Why can't Johnny write?" It was about a year ago that newspapers from coast to coast first carried stories about the steadily declining verbal ability scores on the Scholastic-Aptitude Test. Then in December came the cover story in NEWSWEEK, which was reprinted in the spring in READER'S DIGEST. An analysis less familiar but even more incisive appeared in the January issue of the Yale Alumni Magazine. The decline of writing, argues Professor Giamatti in that issue, can be traced to a "corrosive sentimentality" which has infected all levels of our society, even the teaching profession itself. The public has finally discovered what we have known (or suspected) for a long time: the state of teaching written composition, from elementary school through graduate school, is in deep trouble.

It may seem strange indeed at a time when the teaching of composition is at such a low ebb that anyone should even mention widespread literacy in written communication. If so many of the brightest people in our country have difficulty with writing, how can we expect the average secondary school student to learn the skill? Surely anyone who would suggest such a remote possibility must be an idle dreamer completely detached from the life-and-blood reality of the classroom. So let me establish from the outset that I am not an idle dreamer but pretty much of a practical realist--a realist who has earned his spurs teaching English for seven years in junior and senior high and adult evening schools and who still observes English teaching almost every week of the school year. It is from this background of experience that I submit that, given the current state of knowledge about rhetorical processes, it is possible for this nation's schools to develop a citizenry literate in written expression. From the ashes of what we now call a composition curriculum, there is an emerging outline of how to teach and learn written communication. It won't be easy and we will never be completely successful, but I firmly believe that most Johnnys (and Janes) can learn to write good English prose.

My optimism for the chances of achieving such a literacy at the national level is not based merely on wishful thinking (or even too much bourbon) but on some fairly substantial evidence, some of which is so obvious we have overlooked it, and some so obscure and so hidden away in professional journals we have either never found it or never applied it to our classroom situations. Let us consider, first of all, the current status of the academic subject English as it has evolved in the overall curriculum pattern in our nation. That each state has enacted laws requiring young people through age 15 to attend school is a magnificent humanitarian achievement which is sometimes overlooked, or even denigrated. The dimensions of this achievement become even more evident when our educational system is compared to those of other nations, both developed and undeveloped. The simple truth is the young people are there, in school. Moreover, they are not only there, they are required in most places to study English every year from grades seven through twelve. This means each adolescent studies his native tongue one hour per day, 180 days per year, from age twelve through age seventeen. This represents a grand total (as you are well aware) of 1080 hours of formal instruction in English. Why then should we be surprised, or defensive, when the public is outraged over the number of young people emerging from this system and still unable to write a good English sentence or read a standard passage of prose with some degree of comprehension? For such an investment of time and energy shouldn't they be expected to be competent in their native tongue?

"Ah," a wag responds, "it is true they are there, but they don't see the value of English. So there they sit, asleep. In a word, they are not motivated."

And of course there is a large amount of truth in this. One of the most pervasive characteristics of the modern schools is the general boredom and listlessness of the students. But it doesn't have to be this way. If some of the most articulate spokesmen in the profession are right, much of this boredom can be transformed into productive learning. Several motivational techniques have recently been reported to have achieved some measure of success.

I am always impressed with the results of the "journal" technique, a regular period of time set aside just for writing. It appears that this regular, consistent commitment to writing is an excellent way to foster growth in rhetorical skill. Most readers are familiar with the many contributions of Ken Macrorie (UPTAUGHT, TELLING WRITING, WRITING TO BE READ, Hayden Book Company) but some may have missed an article in the May 1976 issue of ENGLISH JOURNAL. In that article, "When Kids are Free to Write," Daniel Dyer describes the effectiveness of "Friday Writing:"

> And for the past two years "Friday Writing" has been as sacred a ritual in my seventh grade classes as the Constitution and assembly schedule will allow. On Friday all regular activity stops (no matter what's going on), and we all write--in any genre and on any topic we choose.[1]

The technique has also been used effectively with late adolescents and young adults. Jean Pumphrey employs a five- or ten-minute "write-in" to motivate her freshmen at the College of San Mateo in California. Pumphrey finds the technique helpful in getting her young people through that period of dreadful anticipation just prior to the actual writing experience. "Increasingly," she writes, "the students were coming to find they did not want to stop writing after five or ten minutes, that writing for 'five' minutes was a good way to begin, a way to get past that time just prior to writing when the mind rebels." One student was asked if the five-minute write-ins were helpful. "'No,' he replied, 'I want to keep writing.'"[2]

The lesson to be learned from both these accounts, I believe, is that the highest level of motivation is not derived from some external source, such as a field trip or an intense personal encounter or even from reading a book, but from the writing experience itself. It seems to me that both teachers, one at the seventh-grade and one at the college freshman level, are leading their students to care about what they write.

One of the most effective motivational devices I have ever seen employed a combination of group and role-playing techniques. Three prospective teachers enrolled in one of our methods classes prepared and taught in a nearby high school a lesson on (can you believe it?) the Aristotelean topics. The lesson followed three steps:

1. The prospective teachers told the high school class how Aristotle identified certain lines of argument which he called "common topics" because they could be used in almost any persuasive situation. (e.g., "If the more difficult of two things is possible, then the easier is possible too.")

2. The prospective teachers then dramatized to the class how that particular topic might be used in a TV ad, say, for shampoo. ("If Soapy Shampoo can clean this grimy coalminer's hair, it can surely clean yours.")

3. The class was then divided into groups. Each group was given a "topic" and a "product" and was asked to develop a skit showing how the topic might be used in a hypothetical TV ad.

The prospective teachers thought the lesson had gone down the drain, so to speak, because just after the class had been assigned into groups, a bomb scare was announced. Momentarily chaos reigned, but when the students came back into the building, they went immediately into their groups and got busy. When we saw the enthusiasm and how well the skits were done, we all realized just how successful the lesson had been. Somewhere Aristotle must have been smiling.

"Granted, the kids are in school," the wag replies, "and granted, we know quite a bit about motivation. But that's not enough. Just wanting to do something will not get the job done. You got to know how to do it."

This leads to my final point. The most important reason for guarded optimism lies in the recent development and expansion of sound rhetorical theory. Although its importance is often overlooked by classroom teachers, good theory serves two important functions. First of all, theory informs our practice. It provides a rational foundation for our teaching, freeing us from the shackles of directionless wandering and the prison of our personal bias. In a word, theory "energizes" our practice. As Virginia Burke has written,

> The power of a discipline to identify and maintain a field and to energize practice in it should be self-evident. Without a discipline, arbitrary decisions to add or drop a composition course, to write a theme a week or a theme a month, to use this textbook or that, to feature one kind of writing or one kind of reading over another, to evaluate papers chiefly for content or for organization or for mechanics--all such arbitrary decisions are without rationale; no decision at all may do as well as a decision one way or the other. With a discipline, some reasonable sequence, moving from something identifiable toward something identifiable, is clearly suggested; and the scope of concerns within the discipline must be explicitly taken into account.[3]

Second, availability of theory provides a standard against which new ideas may be tested. This is especially necessary for the composition curriculum, for it has long been dominated by certain false ideas which Richard Young has termed "Vitalist assumptions." Vitalism sees the ability to write as a knack, a kind of gift from above. Only certain people, sometimes quaint, unusual people, have this gift. Anyone who has to work at writing is merely "mechanical" and not a truly "creative" person. It follows from the vitalist philosophy then that the teacher's work is twofold: (1) to think up exciting topics to stimulate this latent ability, and (2) to perfect the high art of grading papers. This kind of foggy thinking (which in my opinion is largely responsible for the present state of the composition curriculum) can only exist in the absence of sound rhetorical theory. The more clearly we see through false assumptions such as these, the more fully we rely on sound theory, then the more successful and more effective our teaching will be.

The fullest and most complete theoretical description of the discipline is Gary Tate's recently published TEACHING COMPOSITION: 10 BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAYS. This valuable resource, which should be required reading of English teachers everywhere, provides a comprehensive overview of the discipline as well as specific information about its various branches. It is impossible even to mention the many contributions to rhetorical theory which have occurred in recent times, but four areas deserve some attention. First, Francis Christensen's work with the cumulative sentence and the paragraph have reminded us again of the powerful influence of form in the composing process. Those teachers who have used his work testify to its effectiveness. Second, that series of studies in the growth of syntactic skill--the series which originated with Kellogg Hunt; included the work of Zidonis and Bateman, Mellon, O'Donnell, O'Hare and others; and culminated with William Strong's fine little text, SENTENCE COMBINING: A COMPOSING BOOK--offers explicit directions for that teacher who wants to help his (or her) students enhance their syntactic skill. A third area, the development of conceptual rhetoric, relates the human thought processes to rhetorical categories and patterns. Since teachers are normally preoccupied with the psychological growth and development of their students, the value of a book like Frank J. D'Angelo's A CONCEPTUAL THEORY OF RHETORIC should be apparent to all. Finally, the rediscovery of classical rhetoric, along with its influence on western civilization over the past twenty-four centuries, has contributed significantly to the profession. Edward P. J. Corbett's CLASSICAL RHETORIC FOR THE MODERN STUDENT is probably the single most important publication in our discipline in this century.

The list of significant contributions could go on and on. Enough has been said, however, to indicate the influence on the discipline which these theoretical insights have provided. Teachers of rhetoric and composition need no longer feel like drones, carrying their daily burden of "papers to be graded" and isolated from any genuine intellectual base. I see more pride now among composition teachers than ever before. We are no longer asking, "When can I teach American Literature?" but rather "Where can I find a good discussions and some examples of antithesis?"

In summary then the reasons for some degree of optimism are these: (1) the traditions of public education which have evolved in this nation, (2) a deeper understanding of the motivational basis of the act of writing, and (3) the recent expansion and growth of the theoretical dimensions of our discipline. But if our schools are to help in achieving this literacy, it will be necessary to rearrange some of our present priorities. For one thing, we must eliminate the wasteful duplication masquerading as "review" which now runs throughout the curriculum. Too, we English teachers must fight the temptation of keeping alive many literary works which should have died a natural death long ago, and of bringing to life many current works which should never have been written in the first place.

What deters us from teaching our students how to write? The public wants it; the kids themselves are asking for it; much information about how to do it is available. Strangely many objections come from the profession itself. Pages of the professional journals are filled with various reasons and excuses:

1. The Miss-Fidditch-Is-Dead-And-I'm-a-Swinger Syndrome

   "There is really more to English than learning verbal skills; I want to teach my students how to live."

2. The So-What Fallacy

   "This is nothing new; as long as I can remember kids have not been able to write."

3. Professional Blackmail

   "If they want us to do that, it will cost them 100 million dollars."

4. The Mary Hartman Syndrome

   "I can't possibly read that book because I have four kids, and we live in a two room trailer, and my husband is an alcoholic, and his mother is coming to live with us, and she has Lassa fever."

The time has come for the profession to lay aside excuses and make a concerted effort to solve this nagging, age-old problem. The community is behind us (Did you ever see a parent who didn't want his kids to learn how to write well?), and down deep many if not most kids want to improve their skills in writing. Much remains to be learned about this marvelous faculty we call "the composing process," but we can make a start with what we already know. Who knows? Maybe by the time the 21st century rolls around the dream will become a reality.

NOTES

[1] p. 35.

[2] Jean Pumphrey, "Teaching English Composition as a Creative Art," COLLEGE ENGLISH, Vol. 34 (Feb. 1973), pp. 666-673.

[3] Virginia M. Burke, "The Composition-Rhetoric Pyramid," COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION, Vol. 16 (Feb. 1965), p. 5.

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TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF GOOD WRITING

George Redman, Benedict College

This article is an attempt to describe "good writing" through definition by bad example. I want my readers to compare and contrast actual essays written by actual students, and from these case studies, I would like to suggest that good writing is a gestalt of good grammar plus "truth in problem-solving."

Maybe we already know that. I've yet, however, to find a definition of "good writing" in the literature. I write this, then, as a "seed crystal" of such a working definition, for myself, for the profession, and for all those Jills and Johns who read NEWSWEEK and READER'S DIGEST.

To help you follow my discussion, I ask you to take any available writing instrument, and mark-up, beat-up, evaluate, grade, the reproduced essay HOW CAN ACCIDENTS BE PREVENTED? Do it. Now. I want you actually to mark the pages of this ARIZONA ENGLISH BULLETIN. Especially if it's a library or departmental copy.

1. How Can Accidents Be Prevented

Outline

I. Should driver's education be made compulsory?

II. Should the age limit be changed from sixteen to eighteen years of age?

III. Are Hot-Rod organizations of any value to the community?

IV. Should there be a limit on the horsepower of a car?

One day after school last year as Leonard and I were rounding the corner at home, going about 40 m.p.h., our car suddenly hit loose gravel that had been pushed up on the pavement and the car suddenly went into one complete spin. The next thing we knew we were in the ditch. No cuts, bruises, or wrecked car but it did make me think what the consequences could have been, and one of the reasons why it would be to everybody's advantage to have compulsory driver's education. If more people were taught the dangers of driving and the correct way to drive, there would undoubtedly be less accidents.

The age limit in Indiana is sixteen. In some of the other states the legal driving age limit is eighteen. There was considerable debate at the last meeting of the Indiana Legislature on this subject. A bill was introduced to change the age limit from sixteen to eighteen; however, it was not passed. In my opinion a change in the law to include at least one year of driver's education would be of benefit. Then issue license at the age of seventeen.

Do Hot-Rod organizations and driver's education have anything in common? Yes, reports N.H.R.A., there are many new clubs being started all over the country, their goal, safe driving. They believe that if they can keep Hot-Rod drivers on the designated drag-strips, and off the public streets and highways, they will be doing the public a great favor.

Each year the horse power ratings of the new cars has been steadily increasing. The cars are going faster every year. They have done little toward the braking system and steering, the two most important functions. Also they have not been able to change the people to make their minds react quicker.

There is much publicity on the subject of safe driving; however, people seem to take the attitude that it won't happen to me and thousands continue to be killed unnecessarily year after year. Why don't people "wise-up"?

Identify the major problem(s). Write marginal, terminal comments about the job the student did, about the assignment itself. Assume the theme is (a) a senior in high school; (b) a sophomore in high school; (c) a college freshman's first paper; (d) a senior's paper. If you are not reading with pen in hand, how did you break that habit? Get one and mark the page up. Do you refuse to use red? What other colors do you use? Why? Do you make marginal comments? Do they do any good?

After you have given How Can Accidents Be Prevented? (herein after affectionately called HCABP) a sound drubbing, compare your commentary with the case study in Sr. Judine's A GUIDE FOR EVALUATING STUDENT COMPOSITION.[1]

The autopsy of HCABP, as contained in Sr. Judine's collection of readings, suggests that decades ago the profession was capable of "curing" such writing and that today we are even more adept at helping such writers. What we do need is an explicit definition of what we mean by "good writing."

I suggest that good writing must first tell the truth and at the same time must be true to the unity and coherence of wording, sentencing, and paragraphing in the same sense that the term "true" is applied to a ten-speed bicycle's wheel--not out-of-round. Elizabeth Cowan, too, asserts that the profession needs to "establish a consensus on what constitutes adequate skill in reading and writing....we don't have a standard definition of the term 'good writing.'"[2] The need for such a definition, based on sound research, is of first priority. My purpose, then, is not to dwell upon the obvious but rather to advance towards a basic definition of good writing that includes good grammar but does not exclude accurate problem solving or truthful reporting of "reality."

Good grammar, self-expression, and accurate reporting of the "way it is" are all basic. Good writing must involve both aptness of convention plus accuracy of content.

Where, and how, do we start? Geneva Smitherman provides an example of a teacher missing the true error of a student's written response to a topic. In VIETNAM BAD the student failed to follow directions which read: "Take a position on the war in Vietnam and present arguments to defend your position."

VIETNAM BAD

> I think the war in Vietnam bad. Because we don't have no business over there. My brother friend been in the war, and he say it's hard and mean. I do not like war because it's bad. And so I don't think we have no business there. The reason the war in China is bad is that American boys is dying over there.

The paper was returned to the student with only one comment: "Correct your grammar and resubmit."

One of my students agreed with the teacher: "The first thing I noticed was the grammar!" The true problem, however, is that conclusions are paraded as premises; assumptions are unsupported. The student needs direction, step-by-step help with "wording," and "sentencing." The writer has violated the commitment-response rule; that is, unless he decides to "play politics" or sell "previously owned" cars, or otherwise manipulate, he must not deviate from the topic and comment, the subject and predicate he puts down in the first sentence.[3]

Violate the "given" and one violates the unity; violate the "to prove" and one violates the concept of coherence. Linguists might advise working with the copulas in order to teach that commitment is contained in the predication and that certain rules must be followed, that the sum of these rules add up to unity and coherence. Wilson Currin Snipes summarizes this position: the writer must have a way of "wording" and "sentencing" and "paragraphing" and must "language" his thought and "think" his language. Snipes says that "both knowledge and command of the grammatical system are prerequisites to a command of the logical and rhetorical systems, for grammar is a basic way of creating coherency."[4]

Ken Macrorie diagnosed empty school writing as "Engfish:"

> The automobile is a mechanism fascinating to everyone in all its diverse manifestations and in every conceivable kind of situation or circumstance.[5]

Although this infamous sample would receive flying colors for "literatre" English, note, as Macrorie points out, the empty use of words and the simple untruthfulness: not everyone is fascinated by cars, and today, there are situations and circumstances where cars should be limited or removed.

Since "Engfish" and Doublespeak violate procedural rules, our concern with basics must include such areas. Such deviation is as important as violations of "s-v agr" and capitalization and punctuation:

> When an auto manufacturer is forced to admit the shortcomings of his product, his weasel words can be extraordinary. Recently the Ford Motor Company undertook to "recall" its line of Torinos and Rancheros for correction of mechanical deficiencies. (Is that last phrase a euphemism for slovenly workmanship?) In a letter the company sent to owners of these cars, it conceded that the rear axle bearings "can deteriorate." The letter continued this way:
>
>> Continued driving with a failed bearing could result in disengagement of the axle shaft and adversely affect vehicle control.[6]

Let's underline the subject and verb of the above passage, since part of the deception is in the grammar and "sentencing." The subject continued driving suggests that the real contributory cause of the trouble is the owner of the car, and blame is shifted from the manufacturer. The verb phrases could result and adversely affect deny the laws of physics; the object of the phrase "adversely affect" means "you will wreck, turn over, smash into something or someone, kill yourself and others."

Engfish in school and doublespeak in the market place and in the forum keep one at arm's length from solving a problem. Obsfucation takes the handle off the problem; indeed, hides, denies, that the problem even exists. Linguistic acumen is made to cover the physical deterioration of bearings and the operative laws of cause and effect; morally, the concept of responsibility is hidden, shifted, shirked. We are therefore very much in agreement with our back-to-basics critics that the parts of speech are certainly fundamental.

Thus, the teaching of "basics" must be a double-edged knife--attention to the commitment and response of the sentence and of the paragraph reveals the workings of the interinaminations, the interpenetrations, of all the tiers, the levels, of "wording," "sentencing," and "paragraphing."[7]

Let us further examine HCABP. Unlike VIETNAM BAD, HCABP did follow directions to

list several questions

discuss them

plan an introduction and a conclusion. The teacher who submitted HCABP to Sr. Judine said that an in-class discussion had generated the conclusion, based on a study of the READER'S DIGEST, that introductions should contain action.

The mention of the READER'S DIGEST is perhaps our clue: therein hides the algorithm, the formulaic response. Twenty years ago, the teachers in the case-study knew, as James Kinney cites Jay Robison's suggestion, that there is a crucial difference between merely marking errors and diagnosing problems.[8] Verily, twenty years ago the profession was capable of coming down hard on where such themes as HCABP were coming from: HCABP's greatest fault is that all the words add up to nothing. A teacher correctly observed: "the introduction and conclusion are merely tacked on and the conclusion especially is lacking in intellectual consideration."[9] The theme fails to clash with the topic: sloppy phrasing of the question--call it lack of heuristics or lack of pre-writing--kept one from reaching any solution. One beats around the bush and kills it.

"Failure to show the student his fundamental weaknesses is to leave that student in a fool's paradise," assayed Sr. Judine's case study in 1958. Mere showing won't work--much reinforcement and teaching are needed. Students have the right to be done right by--both HCABP and VIETNAM BAD suffer from insufficient development of an inadequately limited idea--both fail to narrow the purpose to a sharp, data-based question. For instance, "How can automobile accidents be prevented?" or "What is meant by 'hard and mean'?"

The heuristics procedure is one way of strengthening what we already knew how to do from 1958; Young, Becker and Pike suggest sharp ways to focus the spotlight upon problem solving.[10] Rather than lament such topics as "Why don't people wise up?" or "What can be done to change our oppressive administration?" one should "break it down" to probes into the unknown:

a. How induce "them" to extend library hours?
b. How eliminate student driving restrictions?
c. How abolish dorm hours?

One of the evaluators of HCABP summarized the end result of such writing by saying it's like being invited to a steak dinner only to discover all the trimmings but no steak. Empty writing is as dangerous as illiteracy: both fail to solve problems. "The man who can read but doesn't is no better off than the man who can't" says a local bookstore. So too when one uses weasel words and plucked from mid-air research such as "undoubtedly" in "there would be undoubtedly less /sic/ accidents," showing that no homework has been done. The fragment "Then issue license at the age of seventeen" is first a fragment, and second a deviation from the outline--sixteen and eighteen are mentioned, not seventeen--and third, with its underlining, is a cheap way, as Macrorie says, of "making the corn grow taller."

What is basic, then, is grammar plus facility in form and formulaic writing. We need both conventions and an honest voice. In other words, a knowledge of form and formulaic, of conventions plus truth-telling, is needed. We want good grammar and good taste. Critical analysis and thoughtful syntehsis are both components of the composing process of good writing.

Walker Gibson shows how to stop the rambling of a student's writing, and by using the student's own words, frame a set of directions for more specific written response in order to bring the student down from the top of the abstraction ladder:

> Some possible assignments for Joe Wilson's student:
>
> Discipline is the most important factor for a teaching situation. Without it much learning, desired learning, cannot take place effectively. But it must be recognized that too stern a disciplinary procedure could result in puppet responses. It is a difficult problem and any teacher who can control the pupils both physically and mentally is a superior individual.
>
> 1. Focus on a particular situation in which, thanks to a teacher's discipline, you learned something. (Where were you and when? What happened? What did the teacher do, that you call discipline? What exactly did you learn?)
>
> 2. Focus on another particular situation in which, thanks to too stern a discipline, you found yourself making a puppet response. (Where were you and when, what happened? What did the teacher do that was "too stern"? Just what was your puppet response?)
>
> 3. In your experience, what is the difference between learning something and making a puppet response?
>
> 4. It is, you say, a "difficult problem," and no one could disagree. Write a paper about this problem, in which you answer the question: Just what is this discipline" that is "the most important factor for a teaching situation"? What advice can you suggest for teachers who want to bring about "desired learning"?

Society presently expects only good grammar but needs good grammar plus truth-telling; we must learn, teach ourselves, to sharpen probes to stop sloppy thinking and writing that ends in HCABP, in VIETNAM BAD. We must learn to ask the appropriate questions, assign appropriate writing tasks:

> Teachers should be extremely sensitive about the kinds of questions they ask. Not "who discovered America?" but "who was the first non-Indian to come to America?"

Professor Holland's article in this issue also discusses how to frame assignments to avoid the HCABP or the VIETNAM BAD response. Students need patient help in "languaging" thought and in "thinking" their language. Asking the right question is one way, as does heuristics. One heuristic program is suggested here; borrowed from the Physics Department, University of Massachusetts, Amherst:

HEURISTICS:

1. Give things names
2. Classify objects; impose a structure
3. Define the states of a system
4. Consider the transformations of a system
5. Consider all reasonable (simple) relationships
6. Look for conservation principles
7. Observe symmetry relations
8. Look for equivalence relations or analogies
9. Make rough estimates; think in terms of order of magnitude
10. Make successive approximations
11. Consider extreme cases
12. Subdivide large problems into a collection of smaller problems
13. Consider simplification of hard problems
14. Look for independent variables
15. Vary your point of view; be aware of the scale and frame of reference
16. Reflect: think about observing
    think about doing
    think about thinking
17. Ask.

I applied the above concepts to an attempt to get students to climb down from the top of the abstraction ladder by asking for a definition of an abstract term. Before comparing their responses with "love is never having to say you're sorry" or with Fromm's love as "care, concern, responsibility, knowledge," I had a peer frame heuristic-type questions to steer the classmate. One student wrote:

LOVE

> Love is abstract feelings. Love is giving and receiving. Wanting only the best for others is love. Love is the sunshine and the glow of the moon. Love is not walking away. Love is knowing that you'll always stay. Love is me and you, knowing we'll always equal two.

And I thought I'd made things perfectly clear! To get over the large class size, I experiment with group gropes. One student attempted the following probes, sentence-by-sentence:

1. What kind of abstract feelings?
2. Love is giving and receiving what?
3. What are the wants?
4. Explain the love, the sunshine, the glow of the moon!
5. Where are you going to be?
6. How do you know this? Explain.
7. How do you know this? Explain.
8. Explain how you will equal two, always, me and you?

At least, it's a start. I'm optomistic. Maybe we can start hitting the nail on the head, so to speak. After all, it's about time we wised-up, right?

NOTES

[1] Sr. M. Judine, ed. A GUIDE FOR EVALUATING STUDENT COMPOSITION: A COLLECTION OF READINGS (Urbana: NCTE, 1965). Chapter 3 condenses the autopsy of HCABP and provides the full background for the assignment.

[2] Elizabeth Wooten Cowan. CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION, March 17, Vol. X, No. 4, p. 3.

[3] The concept of "commitment and response" is outlined in Robert Gorrell's "Not by Nature: Approaches to Rhetoric," in Tate and Corbett's TEACHING HIGH SCHOOL COMPOSITION (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), and in the April, 1966, ENGLISH JOURNAL.

[4] Wilson Currin Snipes. "The Beginning of Rational Discourse," FRESHMAN ENGLISH NEWS, Vol. 4, No. 2, Fall, 1975, p. 4.

[5] Ken Macrorie. TELLING WRITING, Hayden Books, 1972, p. 6.

[6] Walker Gibson. EUPHEMISM (New York: Harper Studies in Language and Literature, Harper and Row, 1974), p. 16.

[7] Snipes' concept of the underlying logic of grammar, rhetoric, and logic echoes I. A. Richard's "interinamination" of words. Words behave differently than do bricks aligned one atop another in a wall. Each word, although inanimate, interacts with others.

And, James Miller's concept of "interpenetration" is applicable here: HCABP? violates Miller's claim that writing assignments should reflect the basic realities of language, the "symbolic system which reflects or refers or otherwise substitutes for direct experience" does not really "stand apart from or run parallel to direct experience but completely interpenetrates with it." Miller wants us, and students, to know that we use language to explore, construct, and discover: "language is the essential mediator between the perceiving ego and things as they are, the I and the real reality." Ideally, all writing assignments should be grounded in this basic condition, engaging the individual teacher and student in penetrating, perceiving, structuring, creating, or recreating the reality he knows--or all the reality he can come to know" (COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION, December, 1974, p. 367).

[8] James Kinney. "Training Teachers to Teach Composition," FRESHMAN ENGLISH NEWS, Vol. 4, No. 2, Fall, 1975, p. 13.

[9] Sr. Judine's article is a mini-compedium for today's debate: for instance, the assertion "In high school, accurate writing of standard English is more important than the expression of ideas" is juxtaposed with "A second and still important defect is an inability to give each sentence its own unity and structure...." with "High school students should be encouraged to develop a single idea consistently and logically."

[10] Richard E. Young, Alton L. Becker, Kenneth L. Pike. RHETORIC: DISCOVERY AND CHANGE (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970).

[11] John Aragon. "America's Other Children," NEA REPORTER, April 1976, Vol. 15, No. 4, p. 14. Some of the classroom activities we do echo the discussion of linguistic blinders by Miller and Edelman. Recall the spurious and tasteless saw about the supposed writing assignment given at Thanksgiving time on the Pine Ridge reservation: "Write a theme about why you are glad the Pilgrims came to America."

READING IN THE WRITING PROCESS

Kent Kelling, Northern Arizona University

Time and again we instructors of composition receive a student composition loaded with ambiguities, vague pronoun references, and obscure transitions. But when we point out these problems to our student, he often feels that what he has written is reasonably clear. Why does he have difficulty seeing these ambiguities, vague pronoun references, and poor transitions which are present in his composition? Or possibly, if you're as slow grading papers as I, by the time we return the paper our student agrees with us that his writing is ambiguous and his pronoun references are vague; he is surprised at the difficulty he has making sense out of his paper. Yet it's often the case that our student read and revised various parts of his paper over and over again. And he read through his entire paper a number of times before turning it in. His paper seemed clear to him then. Why didn't our student notice the ambiguities, the vague pronoun references, and the abrupt transitions when he was reading and revising his paper?

All too often we instructors of composition receive a student composition filled with what appear to be careless mechanical errors, including spelling errors, grammatical errors, omissions, repetitions, and incorrect punctuation. Our discussion of the paper with our student convinces us that many of these mechanical errors should have been caught when he proofread his paper: our student easily recognizes the errors (especially when we give him some guidance locating the errors); he usually is able to provide acceptable corrections; he is surprised at the presence of these mechanical errors in his paper; and he insists that he proofread his paper, and in fact, claims his roommate read through it too. Yet somehow these mechanical errors slipped past our student's and his roommate's proofreading efforts. Our student assures us he'll be more careful when proofreading his next essay. But these errors persist. How do such mechanical errors slip through the proofreading net?

I believe that recent psycholinguistic insights into the nature of the reading process can help us answer these questions. A better understanding of the reading process can help us see the nature of reading in the writing process: understanding the reading process can help us see what reading in the revision process must be like, if our student writer's attempts at revising his paper are to reduce significantly the presence of poor organization, ambiguities, vague pronoun references, and obscure transitions; and understanding the reading process can help us see what the proofreading process must be like if our student's proofreading is to eliminate mechanical errors from his paper.

The Reading Process

Reading is often viewed as being a very precise process, the purpose of which is to recognize and identify letters and words. The reader is seen as using primarily visual information that comes from the page. Even when the purpose of reading is seen as being to derive meaning from the printed page, the reader is often described as precisely recognizing each letter and word on the page. Reading instruction in elementary classrooms suggests that many educators believe that reading consists mainly of precisely recognizing the letters and words on the page, and associating them with sounds (vocally or subvocally) from which meaning can be derived. For example, reading instruction emphasizing phonics attempts to teach children to associate letters, or spelling patterns, with sounds.

Recent psycholinguistic explanations of the reading process emphasize that the purpose of reading is to reconstruct the author's message;[1] that "reading is not primarily a visual process"[2]--that many types of information other than visual information are needed for reading comprehension; and that reading is not a process in which each letter or word is precisely recognized.[3] I believe that these insights into the nature of the reading process can help us understand our student's reading difficulties in the writing process.

We can begin by taking a look at the graphic display--the black marks on the page--the written material that the reader perceives and somehow reads. As an example, consider the graphic display for this article. As teachers of composition, we realize that this graphic display is more than just linear sequences of letters and spaces:

Dspcmoa uubxaam e tlyksvrr lfsreoe.

We know that the printed marks on these pages are more than spelling patterns which represent pronounceable sequences of sounds:

Itel reegock andom ucted ammering.

We are certain that the ink splotches on these pages are more than just random sequences of words:

> Than random on of ink are these the pages words just splotches more sequences.

We know that the rules of English determine acceptable sequences of words in the graphic display.

But as teachers of composition, we are also certain that the marks on these pages represent more than just a collection of sentences:

> The cow ran over the moon. Colorful green ideas rest furiously. Open the cat.

If we are to understand the process of reading a newspaper article, or a chapter of a text, or a student essay, we must realize that the black marks on the page are not merely letters, nor patterns of letters representing pronounceable sequences of sounds, nor words, nor sentences. The black marks represent some meanings which the author had previously constructed in his mind. The author constructed these meanings based on his knowledge of the world, his experiences, his understanding of the subject matter, and hopefully, a reasonable understanding of his audience.

In order to communicate these meanings, and possibly even to develop his message, the author of the black marks used a very complex code. We call this code a language, and describe it as an abstract set of linguistic rules. The results of the coding process, which the author used throughout his attempts at writing, were linguistic structures which relate meanings (hopefully, the author's message) to their surface representation, the black marks. The black marks (or for that matter, speech sounds) are therefore not directly related to the meanings. The author's black marks are related to the meanings by complex and abstract underlying linguistic structures which he created with his knowledge of the rules of the language.

The reader's basic task is to reconstruct the author's message, which is "represented" by the patterned graphic display. The black marks themselves are not the author's meaning. The black marks merely provide some visual cues: to the person who is familiar with the writing system and the language, the graphic symbols provide cues to the underlying linguistic structures and to the message. For example, the arrangement of the graphic symbols provides the reader with cues to sentence patterns, inflectional endings and agreement, function words, and word structures, all of which are important in conveying meaning.

I suppose this view of the reading process (a process proceeding from the specific black marks through the linguistic structures to the meanings) is complex enough, given the complexity of language. But the reading process isn't that simple. The problem is that the visual cues which the black marks provide don't give the reader enough information to reconstruct the underlying linguistic structures and the message. The reader needs other cues if he is going to be able to reconstruct the author's message. He gets these other cues from his knowledge of the world, his knowledge of the subject matter, and in some cases, a previous knowledge of the actual message, such as the case in which the reader is reading his own composition.

Armed with these types of cues, the reader is able to predict what the message will be, as previous parts of the message unfold. He has expectations as to what will come next in the author's message. When we combine the reader's knowledge of the world, his understanding of the subject matter, and his previous knowledge of the message with his knowledge of the language and his knowledge of the relationships between the writing system and the language, the reader is able to make predictions on various levels, as he reads through the passage:

1. what the message will be
2. what abstract linguistic structures will follow
3. what words, spelling patterns, and graphic symbols will follow.

The reader uses these different types of knowledge simultaneously, interdependently, and to varying degrees, to accomplish his purpose: reconstructing the author's message. He is continually generating, confirming or disconfirming, and if necessary, adjusting predictions about the message. The reader does not have to perceive every letter, or recognize every word on the page in order to reconstruct the message. The reader need only sample information off the page. He selects only the visual information most useful in making, confirming or rejecting, and adjusting predictions. The more he knows about the message (the better his predictions) based on nonvisual information, the less visual information the reader will need. The language is redundant, that is, the language places restrictions on the sequences in which linguistic units can occur (as is evident in the previous examples), and often offers multiple cues for the same piece of information (as is evident in this very sentence in which the words language, is, places and offers all cue the reader to a singular subject). Therefore, the graphic display is repetitive, and much available visual information is not needed in the reading process.

Reading in the Process of Revising One's Own Paper

We find our student's composition filled with ambiguities, vague pronoun references, and obscure transitions. Our student fails to notice these problems when revising his composition. Basically, the problem lies in the inability of our student, who is revising his own paper, to put himself in the shoes of the reader of his paper.[4]

In the normal reading situation, the reader's task is to reconstruct the message, as best he can, from the graphic symbols. However, as has been emphasized, reading is not a precise process. The reader is continually generating, confirming or disconfirming, and if necessary, adjusting predictions about the message. He uses many types of cue systems interdependently in this process: his knowledge of the world, the subject matter, and the language, as well as visual information. The reader samples only that information off the page which is useful to him in generating, testing, and adjusting his predictions, and thereby reconstructing the message. If the writing includes ambiguities, vague pronoun references, or obscure transitions, a reader is likely to be misled, and predict an incorrect message which will eventually be disconfirmed, or at least fail to be confirmed. The reader may have to gather more information, adjust his expectations, and retest them. Therefore, the reader may have trouble reconstructing the message, but may have no difficulty recognizing the unintended ambiguities, vague pronoun references, or obscure transitions.

But when our student is reading his own paper--revising it to eliminate problems involving meaning, such as unintended ambiguities--he, unlike his reader, already knows the message. Consequently, much of the process of generating, testing, and adjusting predictions about the message, in order to reconstruct the message, is unnecessary. It makes little difference, when our student revisor is reconstructing his own message, if his paper is loaded with ambiguities, vague pronoun references, and obscure transitions. He needs little information off the page to reconstruct the message. Our revisor will not generate an incorrect message because he already knows the message. Therefore, while our student who is reworking his paper will have no difficulty generating the message of his composition, he may have considerable difficulty noticing its ambiguities, vague pronoun references, and obscure transitions.

We can help our student revisor overcome these problems, problems which arise because our student is so familiar with his own composition that he has difficulty putting himself in the shoes of his reader. One approach is for our student to get a roommate or a friend who is willing to help in the revision process to read the paper. This roommate or friend will not be familiar with the message. Such a person, since he is not familiar with the actual message, is much more likely to be misled by the ambiguities, vague pronoun references, and poor transitions, in his attempt to reconstruct the message. In fact, one of the advantages of teaching composition through workshop sessions in which student writings are read and critiqued by other classroom members is the likelihood that the student critic will be misled by ambiguities, poor organization, and obscure transitions because he is not familiar with the message. The student critic, therefore, has considerably less difficulty noticing these problems than the student author has, and can point the problem areas out to the author.

A second approach is to suggest that our student set his paper aside for awhile, preferably several days or more, and let his paper get "cold" before at least one of his checks for ambiguities, etc. The advantage to this approach lies in the hope that, during the several days his paper is set aside, our student's familiarity with the message of his paper will decrease. This decrease in familiarity would put our student writer in a situation more like that of his reader: a situation in which the reconstruction of the message is based on many types of knowledge and information, including a considerable amount of visual information, instead of a situation in which the reconstruction of the message is based primarily on a previous knowledge of the actual message. Upon returning to his composition which he had set aside for a week, our student may be surprised to discover the difficulty he has making sense out of a paper he had written, read, and reread a week earlier with perfect comprehension. And if he has difficulty understanding his own paper, we can be sure his reader will have little chance of reconstructing the message with ease.

Reading versus Proofreading

Our student's composition contains many mechanical errors--spelling errors, grammatical errors, omissions, repetitions, and incorrect punctuation. Our student easily recognizes these errors when we give him a little guidance, and he can usually correct the errors. He is surprised that these errors are present in his paper, and insists that he and his roommate had both proofread his composition before it was turned in.

Suppose that by "proofreading" his paper our student means that he reads through his paper and makes corrections where he feels it is necessary. The fact that he failed to recognize and correct many mechanical errors in his composition very likely has to do with important differences between effective proofreading for mechanical errors and effective reading for meaning: differences in purpose, in the extent to which the proofreader can depend upon sampling visual information, and in the extent to which the proofreader can depend upon predicting what is to come next in the text.

The whole purpose of reading is to reconstruct the message which the writer has encoded in the graphic display. But the purpose of proofreading for mechanical errors is very different. Out student proofreader's purpose should be to locate and correct mechanical errors.

To accomplish his purpose our student proofreader must adjust his "reading" to match his purpose. Presently, reading instruction on the secondary level emphasizes flexibility in reading, teaching students to adjust their reading behavior to their purpose for reading: skimming for main ideas, scanning for specific information, or reading continuously for main ideas and supporting details. Likewise, our student proofreader must make adjustments in his "reading," because his purpose is to locate and correct mechanical errors rather than to reconstruct the author's message.

An adjustment our student writer needs to make when he proofreads is to pay much more attention to graphic detail than he does when reading. Reading is not an exact process. The reader samples information off the page, selecting only information which will be most useful in making, confirming, and altering his expectations. But our student who is searching for mechanical errors must be much more concerned with detail. In a sense, he must be concerned with every word, every letter, every punctuation mark. He must consider visual information that is not important in reading. For example, whether the author spelled receive with an ei or an ie is of little importance to our student when reading for meaning. But when proofreading for mechanical errors, this is precisely the type of visual information with which both our student and his helpful roommate must concern themselves.

If our student proofreads his composition merely by reading through his paper as he would normally read, with the purpose being to reconstruct the message, his chances of locating mechanical errors will probably not even be as good as his roommate's. When our student is reading his own paper he already knows the message, unlike his roommate. For this reason, much of the process of forming, testing, and adjusting hypotheses about the message is unnecessary. It makes little difference when our student is reconstructing his own message, if his paper contains many mechanical errors. He needs little visual information in order to reconstruct the message. Therefore, while our student will have no difficulty generating the message of his composition, he may have considerably more difficulty than his roommate in locating mechanical errors.

Although our student who is proofreading for mechanical errors must be, in a sense, concerned with every word and letter, it does not follow that he must precisely perceive and recognize or identify every word and every letter when proofreading. For example, locating spelling errors in a passage is not accomplished by going through the passage precisely perceiving and identifying every letter. Our student looking for spelling errors uses a variety of cue systems, occurring within words, interdependently: visual features of the word's configuration as a whole, word structure (roots, prefixes, suffixes), and spelling patterns, as well as individual letters. Our proofreader searching for spelling errors must also be concerned with cue systems occurring outside the word, such as syntactic information (sentence structure) and semantic information (including the meanings of larger linguistic units such as phrases, sentences, and paragraphs). How else can he proofread his paper for some of the most commonly misspelled words: there, their, and they're, or too, two, and even to? How else could he locate the misspellings in the following sentence?

The none tolled him she had scene a pare of bear feat inn hour rheum.[5]

A concern with detail does not mean that our proofreader can ignore the syntactic and semantic context.

Nevertheless, our student who is proofreading for mechanical errors must be concerned with detail which a reader would not need. While the reader does rely on visual cues within the word to help him reconstruct meaning, he does not rely on visual cues to the extent our proofreader must in order to proofread for spelling errors, typographical errors, omissions, unnecessary repetitions, and some types of punctuation errors.

We can help our student proofreader to recognize mechanical errors by emphasizing the importance of detailed visual information to our proofreader. We know that mechanical errors slipped past our student's proofreading efforts even though he is quite capable of recognizing and correcting the errors, and even though he did proofread his paper. Our student needs to realize that the main reason these mechanical errors were overlooked was either that he and his roommate failed to adjust their reading to their purpose (to locate and correct mechanical errors), or that the proofreading they did was not really for the purpose of locating and correcting mechanical errors. In other words, their proofreading was too much like reading for meaning.

When reading for meaning, there is much more detailed information on the page than the reader needs. He samples visual information, using that which is useful in making, confirming, or adjusting his predictions, and thereby reconstructs the message. What the reader sees on the page during the reading process is determined in part by what is on the page, and in part by what he expects to see. If the reader's expectation is wrong, and what he sees on the page is not actually there, it makes little difference so long as comprehension is not impaired.

On the other hand, what our student should understand is that when proofreading for mechanical errors, he must be much more concerned with detail. He cannot afford to depend on expectations of what is to come next in the graphic display to the extent that he sees what isn't actually there on the page.

Proofreading versus Reading in the Revision Process

A tentatively final reading of the paper for the purpose of locating any remaining organizational problems, ambiguities, or obscure transitions is most effective when performed separately from proofreading the paper for mechanical errors. This is because reading a paper to locate writing faults that very likely will interfere with the reader's comprehension, and proofreading a paper for mechanical errors that probably will not have a significant effect on the reader's comprehension, are quite different processes. In other words, reading a paper in the manner that the reader will read it is very different from proofreading a paper for mechanical errors. In the latter case our student must be much more concerned with detail that is unimportant in the former case. In addition, reading comprehension is hindered by the concern for detail that is important in locating mechanical errors. In fact, some psycholinguists have warned teachers that a reader cannot read for comprehension while concerning himself with the detail necessary for word and letter identification.[6]

However, there is one type of reader who can simultaneously read for comprehension while concerning himself with the detail necessary to locate mechanical errors; our student who is proofreading his own paper. He can do it because reconstructing the message of his paper is no problem whatsoever. He must do it because the location of many mechanical errors is dependent upon an understanding of the message. The danger is that this ability may lead our student writer to think that he can simultaneously read his paper both for problems that could affect reading comprehension, and for mechanical errors. But as we have discussed, effective reading of one's own paper to locate and revise poor organization, ambiguities, vague pronoun references, and obscure transitions requires more than just reading to reconstruct the message. Our student's reading in this case must reconstruct the message in a way very similar to the way his reader, who does not know the message, will reconstruct the message. This requires reading his paper after the message has become less familiar. And if our student is effectively reconstructing a relatively unfamiliar message, in a way similar to the way the reader of his paper will, he cannot be concerned with excessive visual detail. In other words when reading his paper for problems that could affect reading comprehension, he cannot be concerned with excessive visual detail. On the other hand, when proofreading his paper he must be concerned with such visual detail.

NOTES

[1] Kenneth Goodman, "The Search Called Reading," in COORDINATING READING INSTRUCTION, ed. Helen Robinson (Glenview, Ill.: Scott Foresman, 1971), pp. 10-14.

[2] Frank Smith, "Psycholinguistics and Reading," in PSYCHOLINGUISTICS AND READING, ed. Frank Smith (New York: Holt, 1973), p. 6.

[3] Kenneth Goodman, "Reading: A Psycholinguistic Guessing Game," JOURNAL OF THE READING SPECIALIST (May, 1970), rpt. in THEORETICAL MODELS AND PROCESSES OF READING, eds. Harry Singer and Robert Ruddell (Newark, Del.: IRA, 1970), pp. 259-272.

[4] Mark Lester, "The Value of Transformational Grammar in Teaching Composition," COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION, 18, No. 5 (1967), rpt. in READINGS IN APPLIED TRANSFORMATIONAL GRAMMAR, 2nd ed., ed. Mark Lester (1970; rpt. New York: Holt, 1973), pp. 200-201.

[5] Frank Smith, "Decoding: the Great Fallacy," in PSYCHOLINGUISTICS AND READING, ed. Frank Smith (New York: Holt, 1973), p. 72.

[6] Frank Smith and Deborah Lott Holmes, "Letter, Word, and Meaning Identification in Reading," READING RESEARCH QUARTERLY, 6, No. 3 (1971), rpt. in PSYCHOLINGUISTICS AND READING, ed. Frank Smith (New York: Holt, 1973), pp. 65-66.

POOR READERS, POOR COMPOSERS: WAYS TO HELP THEM

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Poor readers are almost invariably poor composers of written composition. Look at the following examples from two students in a remedial reading class. (The opening sentence was given to the students as a "starter.")

> Mark and Byron got themselves into a very difficult situation with two Texons; the course was tragic. he did not have to save him But he did anyway he was there friend. When they were in alley they knew they were coming and one kid had a gun and the others had other weapons. Mark and Byron where going to get Beat Because they were husling pool. now that Charley was dead they sayed he didn't do any thing it showednt of happed it should of happen us use. he didn't deserve when he got shot in the head and he died. Mark and Byron did deserve to get shot in the head for husling pool instead of Charley getin shot in the head Because he didn't do any thing to nobody he was every Body's friend.

> Mark and Bryon got themsleves into a difficult situation with two Texans,
> the consequences were tragic
> Mark and Bryon were at Charlie's Bar husling pool for some money so Bryon chould take Chatey out ~~t~~ There were husthling two Texans. The Taxans realize they were being husheled and decided to teach the Boy a leason and hide in the alley. When the Boys left the Texans called them into the alley.
> Charlie came to rescue them and got shot by one of the Texans. And Mark grabbed the gun Charlie had Brang and shot a the Texans. Chalie felt he had to reccue them.

Such poor writing prompts questions such as: What are the causes for poor composing by poor readers? And, what are some teaching strategies and assignments for improving their underdeveloped reading and writing skills?

The causes seem to be numerous. Frequently, because they are poor readers, the students have not internalized the surface features of language. A glance at the original handwritten samples would demonstrate that students do not know what many words look like in print. Some words are poorly represented visually in that they are misspelled and not legibly scripted. Also, some words are not in students' sight vocabulary, even though the words may be in their speaking or listening vocabulary. If they are not in their sight vocabulary, then the students are not likely to have them in their writing vocabulary. As a result, frequently students are frustrated in their attempts to express themselves because they can't write some of the words they know or because they don't have a sufficiently flexible visual vocabulary to represent their thoughts.

There are other aspects of visual, i.e. written, language not acquired by poor readers. Even though the poor readers may speak fluently and use phrase junctures and intonation patterns to provide meaning to their spoken language, they have not acquired knowledge or use of the visual, written representations of those facets of language. As a result, their writing lacks a systematic and accurate use of punctuation and a varied, purposeful sentence and paragraph construction.

Also, although it may be hard for fluent writers to believe, many students do not have well developed, fine motor skills. Consequently, rapidly produced and smoothly shaped letters and words are not possible for them. The result of this inadequacy is that they cannot easily put into legible script the words and sentences they have in their heads. Thus, fine motor problems can cause writer fatigue and reduce the student's physical ability to script what he would like to say. This inadequacy makes it nearly impossible for the student to generate a sizeable amount of running prose. Consequently, writing two to three pages of material, even meaningless material, is like asking the student to run a six-minute mile. Since he is not in shape for it, he can't do it.

Another composing inadequacy relates to the poor reader's inability to make sense of long narrative or expository passages. Since such students have no concept for a series of carefully composed, interrelated ideas because they have never read and understood such a series, they have little idea how to compose one. So, attempts at composition are frequently disconnected and brief. Thus though poor readers may be fluent, even eloquent, oral speakers and excellent listeners they have not yet acquired the intellectual skills to transpose oral and aural fluency into fluent written language. One result of this concept and skill deficit is that poor readers have little awareness of semantic redundancy. For example, most poor writers write in a "telegraphic" style and leave out many of the inner transitions and repetitions which are necessary for easy reading. Such a telegraphic style presents information to the reader without introduction, without context, and often without essential explanatory detail and reader cues.

Finally, most students who are poor readers and poor composers vigorously resist the suggestion that they revise written work. They may proofread if coerced, but will revise only rarely.[1] The main reason for this is that they do not have the intellectual skills to check whether or not the surface structure (scripted language) they produced represents the deep structure meaning they had in mind. To a large degree those skills are "reading for meaning" skills, and those for checking how the surface structure conveys the intended meaning. And, since reading for meaning is a very laborious task for such students, and one they perform very imperfectly, they perceive the work of refining their written expression as profiting them little and therefore they resist it.

These causes of poor writing are diverse. Further, since some of them relate to poor reading skills they can probably best be solved by a strategy that teaches reading along the way. First, I will delineate a strategy which is global and thus can (not necessarily will) remediate all the writing problems named above. Then I will demonstrate how certain portions of the strategy may be singled out and emphasized to provide intensive remediation of a particular writing problem.

The teaching strategy which I have found to work well on all of the causes named above can be used either with a class or with an individual student. The strategy can be initiated by presenting a starter sentence designed to elicit a narrative or an exposition. For example: "Just as I turned the corner I looked over my shoulder and saw a man tailing me"; or, "I have often wondered what would happen if there was an earthquake where I live." It is essential that the topics be of interest to the students so self-selection is generally better than teacher selection. Also, it is important to select starter sentences which contain content or information upon which the students can expand. Also, sometimes it is better to let the students or the class pick the topic, and then you, or they, can compose the starter sentence. The students are then asked to respond by continuing the narrative or exposition orally. As the students run out of additions, the teacher should ask questions to stimulate or guide more student response. The students' oral composition can be recorded or written down by the teacher as it develops. I prefer to write it for the students as it develops because they can then refer back to and read what they have said for refocusing and stimulus when they run out of additions. However, taping can work well with one student or a small group because it too can be played back. Generally, I find it useful in a class to do the transcription of all (or most) things the student suggest on the overhead projector so that all students can read back what has been written. Nevertheless, I have written on dittos to facilitate producing copies for the students promptly.

After the students' freewheeling production of ideas and phrases and sentences has ended, the next task is transcription. Ideally, the transcription should be typed and double spaced so that the students have a clear text and have room to insert additions and revisions. Thus, the text is generated one day and the transcription is distributed the next.

On the second day each student is asked to read the draft silently as the teacher is reading it orally. The reading is done in this fashion because the numerous student suggestions make it probable that not all the students will know all the words by sight. The students are saved some embarrassment if they are allowed, this first time, to simply read silently. If the transcription is one from a single student, then he should be asked to read it silently, then orally. The silent reading is done first so that the student will have a review of the meanings and words before being put in the potentially embarrassing oral reading situation. In each case the students are to underline words they could not pronounce and/or define.

After the reading, the students should be given an opportunity to write on a 4 x 6 note card any words they could not pronounce. Although the writing of words on cards may seem foolish and laborious, it is essential. Not only are all the visual features of the word inspected in order to write it correctly, but the kinesthetic sequences for proper spelling are established and reinforced as well. Often our muscles tell us how to spell before our brain and eyes do.

Then the students should be given an opportunity to write the definitions for the words. Where possible the definitions should be phrased in plain language and they should be derived from the context in which the words occur. For a class, the definitions should be written on the board for the students to recopy on the back of their 4 x 6 cards. Each student should alphabetically file the cards in his file box or place them in his manila folder.

Up to this point in the reading-writing exercise the students have had practice in thinking about a topic of interest and in using those thoughts to generate oral and written language. They have had an opportunity to read their own "oral" language silently and orally and thereby begin to associate the sounds of words they know with the visual appearance of the words. Then they have written and spelled correctly words they were visually unfamiliar with and derived contextual definitions for unknown words. Thus, they have had an opportunity to associate a meaning with the visual and acoustic features of the words. These associations are invaluable for reading and writing skill development. And finally, the students have been encouraged to write, and write correctly the words and the definitions thereby giving their fine motor skills exercise and training.

The next activity which should be encouraged is the systematic revision of the experience narrative or exposition. Each student should be asked to reread and revise (i.e., re-see) the composition. Here the task is not proofreading but is that of adding material, subtracting material, rearranging and re-writing portions of the composition. This time spent on re-seeing the composition is important but frustrating to the student. He frequently needs some individual help and always needs encouragement. Also, the use of questions and requests for more detail are helpful motivators.

If the students are unable to add additional detail to the sentences, or if they cannot combine two or three sentences into one, a class demonstration of how to add modifiers (don't call them modifiers), i.e. to add detail, will be useful. For example, the sentences a) Jim went down town, b) Jim was tall, c) It was raining, d) He bought groceries, can produce this sentence: Jim, who was tall, went downtown to buy groceries while it was raining. Of course, other variations are possible. Frequently, however, statements like, "Won't you please add some information (or some details) to the ideas (or characters, etc.) in this sentence" are sufficient to encourage the student.

For example, one of my poor readers was telling me about his small motorcycle and how he enjoyed riding it around the acreage where he lived. I had him write about his beloved machine. His first tentative writings were exceedingly "telegraphic" in style. They were unembellished. I simply kept saying to him "write me more about what your motorcycle looks like and how it feels to ride it. How fast does it go? Does it ever break down? How many cylinders does it have? What are the laws governing its use on public roadways?" As he added more and more information (and kept reading and rereading) to his writing, he began to understand the principle of concreteness in written composition. Further, when the material became quite voluminous, 4-5 pages, he (with helpful questions) began to understand the necessity or organizing. Certain details and sentences seemed to match with others. Thus, his perceptions of paragraphs and paragraph sequences were born. And the more he "got into" his writing the easier it was for him to re-see what the composition needed to be communicative.

We did not spend all of our time writing. Some time was spent on reviewing sight words and their meaning from his 4 x 6 note cards. Additional time was spent in using the test-study-test method of spelling; about five words per session were practiced. Thus, his sight vocabulary and motor skills were reinforced.

Although "experience" stories such as the ones described above are an excellent teaching strategy in some respects, the strategy also has limitations. They are excellent in that they offer reading-writing content of high interest to the student and are vocabulary. Also, they are perfect for generating a volume of prose to provide material to practice beginning reading and writing, and revision skills. Yet, when used exclusively, experience narratives provide minimal opportunities for expanding student receptive and expressive vocabularies. Consequently, as soon as it is possible, I begin encouraging and allowing time for extensive reading. Such wide ranging reading must be at the student's independent reading level, and it must be reading that the student chooses. It can include magazines, newspaper stories or want ads, novels or nonfiction. Even material at the student's independent reading level will include words and syntactic structures which are new to him. As the student's receptive vocabulary and syntax comprehension are expanded by reading, it is probable that his expressive writing vocabulary and syntax will be expanded. In addition, such reading provides topics and information for use in composing.

One writing situation to follow the extensive reading can be the experience story as it is described above. Perhaps a more sophisticated writing situation is the Structured Writing (SW). The SW includes an opening sentence to stimulate the student and it has a list of "organizer" questions. The questions are guidelines for the students to follow. For example, an SW for That Was Then, This Is Now, by S. E. Hinton, can go like this.

> The composition you are to write will be about That Was Then, This Is Now, by S. E. Hinton. Today you will do your first draft and tomorrow you will be given time to revise it.

The first sentence in your composition should be this one: *Mark and Bryon found themselves in a dangerous situation with two Texans*. You are to answer the following questions and explain fully what went on in the story while you answer them. Use the questions as guidelines for your composition.

1. What was the dangerous situation and what caused it?
2. How did Charlie rescue them?
3. What happened in the alley after Charlie came out to help Mark and Bryon?
4. Did Charlie deserve what happened to him?
5. Did Mark and Bryon deserve what *might* have happened to them?

With the composition pre-structured by the assignment sheet above, the students will generally write more and the essay will be better organized. Also, after they have written the rough draft and handed it in, the instructor can provide specific guidelines for the revision task to be done the next class session.

If students are to develop skill in revising, they must initially have specific guidance. One guideline in the SW is the specific question. The instructor can read the student's written response to each question and clearly determine if the student has answered it. If not, then the student may be told he has not answered the question and therefore needs to revise and rewrite it. If the question is answered but the response is poorly phrased or disorganized, it is easy to point that out to the student in a conference or by comparing his response to a simply written teacher response. Then, once the student sees what content and sequence are necessary he can endeavor to revise his own response. Further, after the students have done several assignments like this, and after the writing process and revision process have been discussed, then an occasional unstructured assignment can be given so that the students can practice designing and writing their own essays.

The unstructured assignments can be presented gradually. For example, the first step is to provide the starter sentence and assist the students in devising the questions. A second step is to provide only the starter sentence. Each student must devise his own questions. Third, provide only the assignment.

When students use the above reading and writing activities many will gradually develop the intellectual skills to write essays from unstructured assignments. The practice and instruction in reading that they receive along the way should remediate some of their skill deficiencies there as well. Finally, as the student's reading improves, his growing awareness of the visual representation of language should eliminate many problems with the conventions of language such as punctuation.

NOTES

[1] This resistance is not limited to poor readers but is common in college freshmen as well. See "Self-Evaluation Strategies of Extensive Revisors and Nonrevisors," Richard Beach, COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION, May, 1976 (Volume XXVII), pp. 160-164.

TEACHING THE ART OF INVENTION

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Despite the appearance of numerous articles on prewriting and discovering ideas in the professional journals over the past ten years, the art of invention is still a somewhat neglected skill in many composition classrooms. Perhaps teachers are intimidated by what seems to them a formidable and abstract array of categories and questions pertaining to the art. Or perhaps some are bothered by what seems to be an undue artificiality in the process. "Do we actually think like this?" queried one teacher, when faced with the difficult task of getting her students to use the categories of invention, and the questions to which they give rise, in the composition classroom. This teacher, of course, was complaining about the mechanical fashion in which we sometimes have our students apply a set of questions to the topic at hand.

But the artificiality of the process in the composition classroom should not deter us from the essential usefulness of having our students explore a subject or an idea in a systematic way. To the beginning student, learning the techniques of painting or of musical composition might seem equally stultifying and artificial. But that which is artificial need not be construed as being unduly feigned, stilted, or forced. For that which is artificial often displays "artifice," that is, the special art or skill by which something is done. An artificial effort, then, can be a genuine creative effort. The root word, art, suggests that the process is necessarily artificial to the extent that the skill involved in the acquisition of any art comes about by formal study and practice.

If these observations are true, then the art of invention should be taught to our students in a systematic, albeit an artificial, way. The goal is, of course, to make the process habitual so that the student's mind will automatically follow the thought processes involved in exploring ideas systematically.

In this paper, I would like to identify a few of the more promising practical approaches to rhetorical invention and to suggest some applications for the composition classroom.

Free Association

The first approach, free association, is one derived from the discipline of psychoanalysis. Free association is the process of having students talk (if the teacher uses the technique as part of a group discussion of ideas) or write spontaneously, expressing whatever ideas that come seemingly unbidden from their minds. The idea seems to be that thinking is not always logical and that if students are encouraged to let their minds wander freely from one idea to the next, they may discover new ideas and relationships along the way by drawing upon unconscious mental processes.

In teaching the use of free association to students to get them to explore a subject to get ideas for writing, teachers would give their students advice along these lines:

1. Select a general subject that is interesting to you and that seems to have possibilities for extensive exploration.

2. Free associate, by putting down the first idea about the subject that comes to your mind.

3. Put down any responses, no matter how seemingly unrelated or irrelevant they may seem.

4. Since the process of free association is partly pre-logical and ungrammatical, you do not need to put down complete sentences or worry about the logical development of ideas at this stage.

5. Keep free associating until you have a long list of words, phrases, or sentences about your subject.

6. Finally, when you have acquired a fairly long list of itmes, arrange the ideas acquired by grouping them into a coherent whole.

In my own classes, I begin the process by encouraging group participation in the inventive process. I do this by going to the blackboard and writing a single word on the board and then asking the class to follow the procedures I have previously outlined. For example, in a part of one class period I asked my students to free associate, using the word art as the key word. The result was the following list of items:

modern art
pop art
Jackson Pollock
non-representational art
abstract art
Cubism
Picasso
representational art
Renaissance art
religious art
calendar art
portraiture
technique
color
shape
line
texture
painting
the camera
realism
science
nature
natural objects
nudity
Renoir
history of art
art as communication
still life
form
art and literature
T. S. Eliot
Picasso
Shakespeare
DaVinci
Stephen Crane
impressionism
collage
natural scenes
intuition
analysis

After this was done, we discussed ways of limiting the subject and considering a plan of development.

The Journalistic Approach

A second useful approach, derived from the methods used by journalists to write news stories, is the journalistic approach to invention. In teaching this approach, you indicate to your students that every news story (the traditional news story, as opposed to the new journalism) contains the answers to six basic questions and that these basic questions can be used as a way of getting information about a variety of subjects:

Who: George Evans

What: stabbed to death

When: Friday, November 2

Where: Roadrunner's Bar and Restaurant, corner of Central and 1st

Why: lover's quarrel

How: stabbed in the heart three times by Mary Hartman as he was at the bar having a drink with Sadie Thompson

The value of this sort of approach is that the results of the probe can be directly translated into a lead sentence or paragraph which can be made into a full length story by expanding some of the details:

> On Friday, November 2, George Evans was stabbed to death by Mary Hartman, in the Roadrunner's Bar and Restaurant at the corner of Central and 1st, as he was having a drink with Sadie Thompson at the bar.
>
> The whole thing started when Mary...

Not every news story, of course, contains the answers to all of these questions. Nevertheless, it is still useful in the prewriting stage to get students to go through all of the questions systematically to probe a subject for ideas.

The Forms of Discourse Approach

A third approach that I find useful in teaching the art of invention is one suggested by William F. Irmscher (THE HOLT GUIDE TO ENGLISH, 2nd ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976, pp. 46-48), based on the forms of discourse. According to the forms of discourse approach to writing, all writing can be classified on the basis of form into four basic formal types: narration, description, exposition, and argumentation. Consequently, Irmscher reasons, there should be a correspondence "between the basic questions we ask about a subject and the mode of writing we assume."

Irmscher would have us lead our students through a sequence of questions about a particular subject, the answers to which could be directly related to a form of discourse:

What happened? What is happening?	Narration
What will happen? What could happen?	Narration, exposition, argumentation
What is it?	Exposition, including definition, illustration, and process
Who did it? Who is doing it? What did it? What kind of agent is it?	Description and exposition, including definition, illustration, comparison and contrast
Where did it happen? Where is it happening? Where will it happen? When did it happen? What is the background?	Description, narration, and exposition

How did the agent do it? — Description, narration, and process

Why? — Exposition and argumentation, including persuasive writing

The Patterns of Development Approach

A final approach that my students have found relatively easy to work with is one that I have adapted from some theoretical work of my own (A CONCEPTUAL THEORY OF RHETORIC. Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers, Inc., 1975, pp. 38-47) and which can be directly related to the patterns of development (organizational patterns such as analysis, classification, comparison and contrast, and the like).

In using this approach to probing a general subject, the student is presented with a series of categories related to the patterns of development, together with a series of questions which he or she can apply systematically to the subject to be explored. (In a freshman text entitled RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION soon to be published by Winthrop Publishers, I take the student through a sample probe of an actual topic.)

Narration

- What happened?
- What is happening?
- What will happen?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?

Process

- How did it happen?
- How does it work?
- How do you make it or do it?

Cause and Effect

- Why did it happen?
- What are its causes?
- What are its effects?
- What is its purpose?
- How is it related causally to something else?

Identification

- Who or what is doing it or did it?
- Who or what caused it to happen?
- To whom did it happen?

Definition

- What are its limits or boundaries?
- What is its genus?
- What is its species?
- What is its etymology?

Analysis

- What are its pieces, parts, or sections?
- How may they logically be divided?
- What is the logical order?
- What is the exact number?

Classification

What are its common attributes?
What are its basic categories?

Exemplification

What are some representative instances, examples, or illustrations?

Comparison

What is it like?
How is it similar to other things?
How does it differ from other things?

Another plan is to have the student put these questions and categories into the form of declarative statements and apply these directly to the subject being explored:

Tell what happened.
Tell when it happened.
Tell where it happened.
Tell how it happened or how it is changing in time.
State its causes or effects.
Tell who or what made it happen.
Describe or define the subject.
Divide it into parts.
Classify it.
Give some examples.
Point out its similarities or differences to something else.

Not every category or question can be applied to every subject, but by using some kind of systematic procedure such as this, the student can at least get enough ideas to begin writing.

In addition to the approaches to teaching the art of invention that I have outlined above, I like Jacqueline Berke's approach in TWENTY QUESTIONS FOR THE WRITER (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972), and Richard Larson's approach set forth in an article entitled "Discovery Through Questioning: A Plan for Teaching Rhetorical Invention" (COLLEGE ENGLISH, 30, November, 1968, pp. 126-134). These are among the most practical approaches to teaching the discovery of ideas that I know. Two interesting theoretical approaches, which also have some pedagogical value, are Edward P. J. Corbett's scheme in CLASSICAL RHETORIC FOR THE MODERN STUDENT (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, 2nd ed.) and Young, Becker, and Pike's scheme in RHETORIC: DISCOVERY AND CHANGE (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1970).

I'm sure you are aware of the unsystematic way in which students go about getting ideas for writing and the way they basically compose. Clearly, some systematic way of helping them get at their ideas, no matter how artificial it might seem, is better than the hit or miss method that many seem to employ. For the principles of rhetorical invention are nothing more than the principles of logical thought that many of us have learned to apply intuitively in literary criticism or in some related discipline. Perhaps, to many, invention is a natural ability they use to grasp facts, ideas, and relationships. But to those for whom the process seems to be not natural, but artificial and labored, a little artifice may prove to be not only expedient, but hopefully artful as well. From ingenuity to ingeniousness.

WHAT'S IN A NAME? A SUCCESSFUL WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Gail Fisher Briscoe, Tempe High School

About a year ago Scholastic's VOICE magazine presented an article on the meaning and origin of names ("Your Name and You," Niel Glixon, October 7, 1975, pp. 6-11). While I was reading the article it occurred to me that here was a topic that had the potential for a researched writing assignment that would appeal to even the most reluctant student. When our librarian informed me that there were available about 35 hardback and paperback sources through inter-library loan, I felt that I had the necessary tools to make this assignment successful. I believe that this has been one of the most interesting and successful writing assignments that my remedial Freshman Communications students have written.

The VOICE article acted as a catalyst to make the students curious about their own and other people's names. For example, my students were surprised to discover that John Wayne's real name is Marion Morrison and Judy Garland was born Frances Gumm. We discussed how people and their names sometimes become stereotyped. It was agreed that Marion Morrison most likely would not have become the successful cowboy hero that John Wayne is.

After talking about other people's names, we discussed our own names and whether or not we liked them. We found out how many people in the class used a nickname or middle name instead of their first given name; it turned out to be over half the class. Explanations for this were discussed. Then I asked how many students knew the meaning of their name. Several had a few vague ideas about this, but no one really knew anything for sure. I explained that there were books available in the library that would give us information about our names, and that each person was going to look up their name and use that information to write a short paper about his or her name. This process is called "research" and the paper that they would be writing is called a "research paper." I gave them an assignment sheet with the following information:

> YOUR NAME ______________________________________
> First Middle Last
>
> Look up the origin and meaning of your first name in five different books. If you have extra time, look up your middle and last names too.
>
> Use one sheet of paper for each book that you find information in. At the top of each paper give the following information about the book: author's name, book title, publisher, copyright date, and page numbers where you found information.
>
> For example,
>
> Friedman, Favius. What's in a Name? Scholastic Book Services, 1975, p. 24.
>
> If you copy information directly from the book, put quotes around that information and make note of the page.
>
> Using the information that you found while researching, write a paper about your name. You should plan on it being about one to two pages long. Give your paper a title. The last page will be a

bibliography; that is, you will list the books in alphabetical order by author (like the above example) that you used to write the paper.

Three class periods were spent in the library researching. Rather than search for the books on the shelves, the books were available to us from library carts. Having 35 sources to research it really helped (some were duplicates). The most helpful books could hardly be passed around fast enough. At the end of this article I've listed some of the books that were especially good for this assignment. There was one librarian to assist me each period and at the end of the period I kept all the papers so everyone would have their materials the next time that we met.

Other things happened while we were doing our research. I observed students helping each other. If someone came across information that applied to a friend, that person would make a point of sharing it. There were also a couple of students who came into the library on their own to do extra work. The librarians told me about these students and helped them while they were there. A few students had time to look up their middle and last names too. I encouraged this so the faster students wouldn't get bored while the slower ones were still researching. I also observed the faster students helping the slower ones. Some students even had time to look up their friends' names and make notes to pass on to them.

After researching, about five class periods were spent writing rough drafts and final copies. We minimized footnoting problems by including them within the text. Final papers were written in ink. I went over the rough drafts individually with each student. This takes a long time, but I wanted this to be their best writing. I wanted the students to write a paper that they would keep instead of throwing it away as they usually do. Students were evaluated on the effort they put into their research, the manner (style) in which they presented the information, and on how well they expressed themselves on paper.

Two essentials for a successful research writing assignment are motivation and available sources. This assignment fulfilled both criteria and was successful for my particular students. I believe that this assignment would be successful in any composition class.

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TEACHING RESEARCH METHODS

Russell R. Larson, Eastern Michigan University

On a quiet afternoon at the end of last semester, one of the teaching fellows I supervise burst into my office. "You won't believe this," he said, "but I've just had two students in the same class turn in the same research paper." The next day another teaching fellow found that a third student had turned in that same paper in one of his classes.

Plagiarism is common in composition classes. In fact, plagiarism has become so common throughout the university over the past ten years that out-of-class paper assignments, particularly research assignments, have become less frequent. Many teachers, not merely teachers of freshman composition, have modified their demands to the point that research methods are not being taught effectively. As a result, even teachers of graduate classes can no longer assume that their students know how to do research and to write up the information they have gathered.

Over the past ten years, moreover, there have been changes in student attitudes. Plagiarism occurred ten years ago, but students generally would accept the authority of the teacher. If the teacher said writing a research paper was important, the students tended to believe him. If they did not agree, they did not resist overtly. Two or three years ago, however, a teacher beginning a unit on the research paper could expect groans and at least a superficial attack upon the value of the assignment. Students tended to see the research paper as busy work. And often they were right. As one student told me, "In high school and junior high, when I was given a paper to do, I always copied from the encyclopedia." When a teacher accepts such work, the student develops poor habits and negative attitudes. In addition, if a student entering college discovers that he can purchase or "borrow" papers on almost any subject and get away with it, is he at fault?

I am, after all, in charge in my own classroom; if I believe that the library and its resources are the heart of education, both graduate and undergraduate, I must structure my classes accordingly. I need to remind myself that research techniques involve more than the proper form for footnotes and bibliography. The process is more important than the form because research involves examining ideas rationally; it involves approaching ideas critically. Even an underprepared student must eventually develop the ability to handle this process.

The problem then becomes how to set up a system for teaching research methods in composition. On the most basic level, the problem is modifying student behavior. On a more complex level, it is modifying student values.

Although teaching is such a personal matter that methods will inevitably vary from instructor to instructor, some guidelines can be established for modifying student behavior. First, emphasis must be placed upon having students go through the process they are to learn. Lecturing students on the card catalogue, the READER'S GUIDE TO PERIODICAL LITERATURE, and proper footnote form is of little value. At any given moment in the process of writing a research paper, the student may need help, but information will become meaningful only as it fits into the context of the student's own work.

As a result, a composition teacher must take his students to the library. He must carefully explain the importance of the assignment. He may arrange a brief tour of the facilities, and he may need a place where he can periodically give brief lectures to his class. The majority of his time, however, must be spent consulting with individual students as they work through individual problems in the library. In other words, both instructor and students should spend approximately three weeks of class time working in the library, the instructor consulting with students as they go through the process of writing their papers. The students thus are learning to use their first line of resources--their teacher, their text, the library personnel--to open to themselves the vast amounts of information in the library. As they work through their problems, they will learn to reason and to think critically about their material, because they will actively go through the process of writing a research paper, a process that will force such responses.

Getting students into the library, however, is not by itself enough. If students are to change their patterns of behavior, they need more structure. By a specified date they must submit a full statement of their topic and a working bibliography. Later they must show their note cards, and still later they must submit a rough draft. The final version, carefully presented in proper format, should be turned in with rough drafts, note cards, and xeroxed copies of all magazine articles used. Only by checking each step to see that the student actively goes through the process can the teacher hope to modify student behavior. This procedure will allow the instructor to supervise his students' work so closely that plagiarism should be almost impossible.

Just as important, the topic for the research paper should grow out of the students' own interests. Although this approach makes plagiarism more likely, the advantages in terms of motivation are more important. I do not write well when I have no interest in my topic, and I find the same behavior in my students. When students are interested in their topics, words, sentences and ideas become more important, and their writing becomes less mechanical.

The problem of modifying attitudes, however, is complicated. Many students who have not matured enough to appreciate the values involved in education will resent the research paper, even if they are allowed to choose their topics. Still others will not meet the requirements, forcing the instructor to give failing grades. Yet the instructor has no choice. If careless or plagiarized work is accepted, instructors are teaching values that undermine the school or university.

Teachers have choices in composition. They can eliminate the research paper and hope the student will pick up the skills and values he needs elsewhere; or they can half-heartedly teach the process of the research paper and undermine the principles of education; or they can teach the process of writing the research paper, believing that as students learn the appropriate patterns of behavior they will also develop appropriate values. Hopefully, in the last years of this decade student and faculty attitudes will merge to strengthen our commitment to the critical examination of ideas and to carefully reasoned thought, for however weak man's ability to reason may be, it is the tool with which he can shape his world.

WITH DANGLING MODIFIER PROBLEMS, THIS IDEA WILL HELP STUDENTS

James H. Chadbourn, Needles High School, Needles, California

Traditional teaching techniques turn training to tedium when attention is focused upon dangling modifiers. An exercise combining English with art will teach students a difficult point of syntax while stimulating creativity.

The teacher passes out a list of ten sentences wherein misinterpretation of dangling participles leads to comic situations. Students then illustrate three of the sentences, as written, and rewrite the remaining seven, eliminating the misplaced modifiers. Drawings may be shown later. Examples of possible sentences are:

1. While learning to walk, Mom watched the baby very closely.
2. Waddling along the beach, the boys saw the duck.
3. Filled with people, we could not see the huge foot in the museum.
4. Laughing hysterically, the horse thought the jockey was crazy.
5. Exploding unexpectedly, the students stampeded out of the cafeteria.
6. After howling loudly, mother fed the dogs.
7. Standing on his hind legs, dad trained the dog to sit.
8. Roast beef is very good but a cookie, when starving, is delicious.
9. Slithering along the trail, Arthur watched a giant snake.
10. While eating his Purina Dog Chow, Harry looked at Fido.

After translating the words into graphic terms, students will readily realize the absurdity of the situations and will be more likely to avoid this error in future writing.

SENTENCE RELAYS

Jean H. McLellan, Pima School, Scottsdale

Third graders need practice recognizing and writing sentences. A sentence relay is an interesting way to get sentence practice and to have fun.

In a sentence relay a class may have as many teams (2, 3, or 4) as there is chalkboard space on which to write. The first person on each team writes one word and passes the chalk to the next in line. Each student continues to make the sentence grow by adding a word. The last person must add the final punctuation mark also. The added words must, of course, make sense.

The relay can be timed and the team with the most words can win a point for each word. However, my students this year voted not to make it a race. They wanted each person on a team to write one word. They were not to talk to each other after the relay began. They had one minute to proofread. The team with a correct sentence got one point. If all were correct each team got a point.

The students made their own rules and I think that made the game interesting to them. The comments they made after writing the sentences about content and punctuation definitely proved they were learning more about sentences.

Some variations could be:

1. A word (noun, adjective, or verb) or a subject (ocean, horses, lollipops) could be handed each team and their sentence would have to pertain to the subject or include the designated word.

2. Players could write two or more consecutive words.

3. If both sentences were correct a student panel of judges could award points to the team writing the most interesting sentence.

WRITING SECOND-HAND

Tim Morehouse, Walnut Hills High School, Cincinnati, Ohio

Writing second-hand is an exercise I use at the beginning of a composition course. Most English teachers are familiar with Ken Macrorie's UPTAUGHT in which he introduces the word Engfish--"a feel-nothing, say-nothing language, dead like Latin, devoid of the rhythms of contemporary speech, a dialect in which words are almost never 'attached to things' as Emerson said they should be." To break down the Engfish habit, to get my students interested in writing what they honestly think and feel about their world, I re-introduce them to a master craftsman, E. B. White. (Who can forget CHARLOTTE'S WEB, STUART LITTLE, THE TRUMPET OF THE SWAN?)

To begin, find copies of White's EVERYDAY IS SATURDAY, ONE MAN'S MEAT, THE SECOND TREE FROM THE CORNER, or THE POINTS OF MY COMPASS. Because supplies of these books may be difficult to locate, type stencils of selected portions for distribution to the class. In browsing through EVERYDAY IS SATURDAY, you may find such gems as:

Sun

> June 6, 1931. Attempting a sunbath on the warm and hospitable steps of the Library, we were soon rooted up by a uniformed guard. "No sitting, standing, or lounging on the stoop," he said. This rule seemed to us an indignity--the steps were a place for sitting in the sun, and sitting in the sun was all there was to life, anyway. We said so to the guard. "Well," he replied, "it was pretty bad here, when we let 'em sit on the steps. Women used to loll here and fellers would parade around in front of them." I reminded the guard that in that respect they were probably much like the pigeons, which are still allowed by the Library's board of control to parade where they will, the cocks in front of the hens. At this the guard scowled, and we scowled back. Then we departed, still scowling, to search for a sunny ledge somewhere else, or mayhap for a woman to parade in front of.

Students, familiar with school rules about loitering in the halls, begin to see that honest, real, everyday problems can form the subjects for brief, informative, humorous paragraphs. Who doesn't open a daily newspaper? For instance:

Opening The Nation

> March 23, 1929. We arose on a sunny morning, feeling rather splendid. We opened The Nation, which had arrived in the mail. "What is happening to Marriage?" asked the front cover. We laid it gently aside and opened the World. "Sex in Civilization" was the first phrase that caught our eye--a two column book review about a big book containing thirty-two essays on sex: sex in relition, sex in psychology, sex on the Mississippi. The day for us was practically ruined. Our hasty opinion is that what is happening to marriage is this--every husband is in the attic writing an article called "What Is Happening to Marriage?" and every wife is at her desk in the editorial office of a magazine dictating notes to authors saying: "Dear Mr. Zerphus, it occurs to us that on the subject 'What Is Happening to Marriage?' Wouldn't you like to write it?"

> As for sex in civilization--sex is now so academic it's no fun anymore. Kiss a girl and it reminds you of a footnote. (EVERYDAY IS SATURDAY)

Or in reference to popular jargon--and all students have an ample supply of cheap words, made-up words, and cliches which they use unknowingly in their writing, share with them White's:

Boop

> May 14, 1932. Unless Helen Kane gets her $250,000 damages from the company that is alleged to have stolen the word "boop" from her, we won't believe there is any justice. If you own the word "boop" you've got something. It's not like the word "scofflaw," which is on every tongue, or the word "indefatigable," which nobody wants anyway. "Boop" is not like that. Who steals Helen Kane's purse steals trash, but the company that took "boop" away from her ought to be made to suffer. Everybody else has suffered; why shouldn't the company? (EVERYDAY IS SATURDAY)

Next step: ask students to clip short, eye-catching articles from the daily newspaper, school newspaper, or weekly magazine of their choice. Ask them to bring two articles to class; share clippings, discuss the "human interest" aspects, and then request each one to write a one-paragraph personal view of some point in the article. By comparing the original with the student's second-hand version, lively class discussion may result and good ideas about organization, sentence structure, diction, can be acquired. Frequently, the student versions are far more honest, straight-forward, and critical of human nature. And furthermore, my writers soon develop an eye for a good second-hand story: for example, one boy wrote about Colonel Sanders (of fried chicken fame) and his chauffeur becoming lost in a Louisville cemetery while searching for the Colonel's statue and future resting place; another wrote about Jeb Magruder's wife, Gail, explaining how God and the Junior League helped her survive political disgrace.

The one-paragraph requirement forces students to trim their sentences scrupulously; they must be aware of how their words sound, the tone and focus of their ideas. They are not deceived by E. B. White's apparent simplicity--classes soon realize how eacting his word choices are, how lyrical his phrasing, and how he seems to be talking to them naturally. The whole purpose of this beginning exercise is summed up quite well in Strunk and White's THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE:

> Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.

When you move on to personal narration, exposition, description, argumentation/persuasion, etc. you may notice honest language that says something. What a great feeling to want to read your students' papers!

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AT THE END OF THE RAINBOW: THE LIBRARY STOREROOM

Timothy Scannell, Westwood High School, Mesa, Arizona

Preventing dullness in composition is only a dusty fingertip away in the storeroom of the campus library. These little used back rooms contain a mine of art prints, bound magazines, and backlogs of newspapers. Why should they turn yellow, brittle, through disuse? Is not a dogeared demise far better? This mine of culture provides an intrinsic structure of clarity, coherence, and unity, for its contents were created by our civilization's finest artists and writers. They also provide unending material for five critical composition forms: precis, summary, analysis, interpretation, and comparison/contrast. I think the five assignments below clearly illustrate the potential enrichment that waits for the student who becomes engaged in the art of writing, no matter--to paraphrase Chaucer, 'our lives so short, the craft so long to learn.'

1) TIME magazine essay--the precis. The precis reduces information by eighty to ninety percent while adhering to the original author's bias. Its writing involves four steps: reading an essay of choice carefully and looking up vocabulary not understood (a spinoff assignment); distillation of each original paragraph to a sentence or phrase; rewriting; keeping the original bias intact. This assignment not only builds vocabulary, but prevents ensnarement in multitudinous statistics, authorities, and instances while insuring the honest representation of another person's viewpoint. It also guarantees the necessity of grappling with transitions in composition.

2) TIME, NEWSWEEK, U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT cover stories--the summary. This second and sequential step in writing worthwhile compositions on issues and American culture requires a 'cartload' of recently bound magazines trucked into the classroom. The above mentioned weeklies carry cover stories of 3,000 to 5,000 words on contemporary issues, world affairs, modern living, personalities, and so on. Why not make use of them to encourage young writers, and young citizens, to actually know 'what's up' while simultaneously providing meaningful, coherent structure in composition? As before, let the student select his own material. The first two steps in writing are, as with the precis, careful reading and the looking up of unknown vocabulary. The third step, distillation of paragraphs to sentence and phrase, is altered somewhat, inasmuch as the student selects only that material necessary for unity, coherence, and clarity. The final step is altered also: the writer can and should interpret, evaluated, and judge, deleting where he feels it is necessary and providing the appropriate transitions. Assuming a reduction in length from the original article similar to that in the precis, an essay of 400 to 800 words results. For a second time there has been vocabulary, precis, and summary practice, and beneficial wrestling with composition devices, structure, style. Finally, the writer has said something substantive on a topic of his choosing.

3) Old TIME, NEWSWEEK, etc.--comparison/contrast. Now go back among those bound magazines a decade or two. Yes, the dust is much thicker, but most will blow away as you truck the volumes from the library to your classroom.

Let me wax philosophical for a moment. The student today hardly recognizes the existence of the past, and is even less aware of its tumultuous detail. Here lies an opportunity for the proverbial killing of two birds with one stone. The entire world went through social revolution from the late fifties through the decade of the sixties. We must not deny our young people an experience, an awakening to their social roots and psychic origins. Among these are the minute, personal analyses of presidents (beginning with Eisenhower's heart attack) and other public figures; the civil rights movement; the flight to the moon, development of transistor and Polaroid; the Suez-Dominican-Republic-

Lebanese-Israeli-Congolese-Vietnamese-Chzechoslovakian battles; the Beatle-Rolling Stone-Berkeley-Woodstock-Hippie-Yippie lifestyle alteration phenomena; the record-TV-movie-fashion-literary-artworld revolutions; Ecology. Today's students enjoy the freedoms wrought for them by these social upheavals, even though our own aging ears, eyes and minds are a bit fatigued. Let this citizen perceive and feel his origins, the unforgiving, even uncontrollable forces that have placed him at October 1, 1976. I think you understand--we've been there.

The possibilities here for the comparison/contrast theme are endless, as each periodical uses a relatively consistent 'departmental' format, so compare/contrast the Movie department in TIME, March, 1964 with TIME, March, 1968. How are themes and movie characters similar? In what specific ways do they differ? In evaluating theme and character, what is shown about our culture? Important questions such as these can now be interpreted and supported by the young writer, because he has some source material to substantiate his analysis and opinion. Practiced once again are precis, vocabulary, summary; the last with a vengeance now, for the student juggles several variables. This assignment forces reaching and complexity--a worthy goal in composition; a search for coherent structure and purpose, and selection of meaningful detail. And our writer has been prepared.

4) EDITORIALS ON FILE (bimonthly by FACTS ON FILE, Inc., $175 yearly)--comparison/contrast. This useful service collects editorials from newspapers across the country, compiling the opinion of our best editorial writers, clustering them around vital issues: the Hearst Trial, gun control, the ERA amendment, to mention only a few. There are usually 20 to 30 editorials selected from papers with large and small circulations reflecting the entire political spectrum. Here, the student is exposed to shoddy and solid argument, subtle and blatant propaganda devices. Such an array will not only make him stop to think, but might very well strengthen his own ideas and identity. He will certainly discover that he does not stand alone in his views. Careful reading, weeding out unnecessary material, choosing a platform from which to support analysis, are among the pleasant results of this assignment. I have found that students quickly recognize fallacious reasoning while, conversely, creating support through careful evaluation of reasons, examples and authorities.

5) Art Prints--comparison/contrast. We have reached the highest rhetorical plateau in terms of invention, disposition and elocution: the writer, hopefully, can choose argument, determine point of view, carefully select and arrange specification, and fuse his own 'self' to expression through composition. And let us be hopeful and encouraging: writing is difficult, writing is no fun. And let us continue to help with structure a bit, too.

The library I enjoy has well over one thousand art prints. Select several dozen paintings, say three each of animals, portraits (men, women, children), seascapes, cityscapes, and landscapes. Pin or tape them to the walls of your room as sets of animals, and so on. Let the students cluster their desks before a set of their choosing; I have found from past experience that three or four seem to enjoy working together. Each writer in a group creates an individual composition, of course. Allow a day for discussion, selection of purpose or thesis, and structure. Give them tools: the elements of vision--light, line, color, form, juxtaposition, frame, point of view, texture, perspective, motion, and pattern. Define the terms and discuss their application, using another painting or two that you have carefully analyzed yourself well beforehand. Do this with the class. Don't assign, then turn away, for this is when and where you are most needed. Now they are prepared to interpret the color in seascapes by Homer and Marin; contrast the models in Hopper and Tooker; compare the lighting in Wyeth and Whistler. They can argue cogently as to their preferences in landscapes, explaining why they favor chaos and action opposed to passivity and sentimentality. They have become critic and interpreter of their own lives, their personal feelings, their integrity.

I have done these assignments a dozen times in intermediate and advanced composition classes. I have slightly altered and refined the presentation of them each time I used them, and I appreciate the insights the students have given me as to what writing really is. I have seen, time after time, an evolving pride in the completion of a meaningful task. Teachers who use these assignments will be pleased. Students will be confident. They will grow to love and care for their world. That dusty library storeroom will breathe again.

SITUATIONAL WRITING IN TEENAGEDOM

Donald Roberts, John Day, Oregon

Reading high school students' essays is often like being lowered headfirst into a giant vat of predigested pablum. In an expository writing class, the problem is not getting students to write; the problem is getting students to write anything which transcends the cure for insomnia. The fatal error that so many writing instructors make is to assign subjects or topics for writing which are divorced from the student's background and experiences and, therefore, beyond the scope of the student's analytical abilities.

Credibility in expository writing occurs as a result of expertise. What are we doing assigning topics concerning complex issues, involving a grasp of sociology, psychology, economics, religion, and government? Persons of academic accomplishment, having obtained doctoral degrees and nervous tics in the pursuit of specialized knowledge, have insurmountable difficulties delving into the socio-cultural problems of the day. The average high school student's written opinions concerning the nebulous issues prevalent in a highly complex society are liable to be so naive and superficial as to inspire absolute rage, self-pity, and morbid dread in the instructor condemned to read said essays.

The problem then, is to seek out those subjects upon which teenagers are most likely to display expertise. Knowing full well the teenager's propensity for trouble, his ability at rudimentary manipulation, and his uncanny avoidance of annihilation (despite a hostile environment), one must be impressed by his simple ability to survive and prosper. Most teenagers are experts at getting themselves into and out of a myriad of difficult, embarrassing, and threatening situations. It is this myriad of situations to which the writing instructor should address himself and his students.

I have discovered that a most effective writing exercise is to provide the student with a variety of formulated situations to which the student can apply himself I loosely construct each situation with an automatic assumption of inexplicable involvement. The accounts of the situations are written in second person. The student's problem is to clear up, explain, or resolve that particular situation in which he suddenly finds himself. In order to do so convincingly, the student must summon up his persuasive abilities, devious tactics, imaginative potential, and, in final analysis, language skills. According to the situation, the student's writing can take the form of a letter, a descriptive narrative, a dialogue, a speech, a whimsical dissertation, or even a poem. The following are some of the situations I have used successfully in my expository writing class:

1) You are at college and have managed to deplete your funds completely by mid-semester. The situation is desperate, and the only place left to turn is your parents. Construct a convincing letter of financial appeal.

2) After having walked out of the store you were shopping in, you discover you are absent-mindedly still holding an unpurchased article. You turn to re-enter the store, only to discover the store manager silhouetted in the doorway. Script your ensuing conversation.

3) You arrive at your hotel late at night, only to discover the clerk has no record of your reservations. There is a convention in town, and no other rooms are available. How would you handle this situation?

4) You have purchased a machine, which has managed to malfunction only a week later. Your demands for repair or refund are met with studied inertia. Formulate a vitriolic letter to the president of the company which manufactured your derelict machine.

5) You are standing on the bridge of a ship far at sea, when you decide on a whim to put a message in a bottle and throw it overboard. What would you write in that message?

6) Your friend has introduced you to a very attractive individual, who lives in a nearby town. Upon reflection, you decide you are madly in love and must get better acquainted. Write a letter which will arouse interest on the part of your quarry.

7) You have been driving almost double the speed limit, when you suddenly notice the little red bubble machine going behind you. Script a realistic version of the inevitable conversation between you and the officer.

8) It is a warm summer night, and you are alone in the backyard, when an U.F.O. drops in uninvited. Its occupant demands, in broken English, that you give three good reasons you shouldn't be zilched with the molecule scrambler. Describe the scene and record your response.

9) Your two-year-old sister/brother has mastered the pronunciation of a dirty word. While sitting in church on Sunday morning, he/she decides to shout the word with unabashed enthusiasm. Describe your reactions.

10) You are in the high school office, and no one is around. You notice the intercom has been left on, which presents an irresistible temptation. What would you broadcast to the unsuspecting school?

11) You hear a commotion outside. Upon investigation, you discover your dog firmly attached to the mailman's ankle. Talk you and your dog out of this predicament.

12) You are totally involved in a TV program which is halfway finished, when your patriarch walks in and flips the channel to a football game without so much as a glance in your direction. Describe how you would diplomatically recover your channel.

13) You and a friend go to lunch while shopping downtown. It is not until you are seated that you discover that the cheapest meal on the menu is $4.50. Your combined total assets after shopping are $5.00. Describe what you would do (include details of your surroundings).

14) You have decided to dump your current steady, but you are too cowardly to do it face to face. Write a letter which will convey the message without inspiring despair, suicide, hatred or murder.

I have described 14 situations which have worked in writing class and have resulted in essays transcending the norm. These 14 situations represent a small fraction of the almost limitless possibilities. The students, themselves are a vast resource; possessing the unique qualities of teenagedom, they will provide difficult and unusual situations where none previously existed.

If you are interested in inspiring writing of an enthusiastic and imaginative nature, turn your students on to situational writing. Forget, or temporarily ignore, the boring rigors of academics. After all, logic, reason, and eloquence are borne on the current of reality, and teenage reality is a bizarre jungle of situations.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN CAN COMMUNICATE CREATIVELY

Aimee Chick, Pueblo School, Scottsdale

With the current trend in all areas of curriculum being "Back to Basics," no doubt Language Arts, and writing skills in particular, are going to come in for added emphasis. Teachers have heard the same cry up and down the elementary school scale, "Why doesn't someone teach these children how to write a decent sentence?" It can be done, and done very effectively, but it takes two elements from the very beginning. These are teacher-pupil goals and careful planning. The days of "All right children, today we are going to write a composition about ___________ are over. With the added competition of TV and other media forms, where children do not have to do anything but just sit and watch, additional planning and presentation must be part of the teacher's responsibility. Written compositions as well as other forms of creative writing must be presented in a way that allows for continuity, a stimulating situation, and sufficient time for the student to complete the assignment.

In every case, I have found the most productive, interesting, and grammatically sound writing resulted when it was tied to a specific unit. To be precise--the beginning of the school year is an excellent time for the children to write an autobiography. Not only are they interested in the subject (themselves), but the autobiography is a wonderful way for the teacher to get acquainted with the students. This Language Arts unit combines writing, reading, listening, seeing, and doing related art projects. The major written assignment revolves around a five-part autobiography divided into sections entitled Family History, Babyhood Facts, Early Childhood, Growing Up, and Here and Now. What better way to teach organization of material, paragraphing and grammatical skills, as well as the importance of individual differences? Parent participation and cooperation enters naturally, for where else can the student get such pertinent information on his early life? As the rough draft for each section is finished, the child and teacher confer. This provides the teacher with the opportunity to help the student proofread the material, to suggest additions or deletions, and offer encouragement. After the section has been discussed at this conference, the child copies it over carefully (here is the time to incorporate penmanship) and adds the section to his book.

Specific skill areas emphasized in this unit include: outlining, writing paragraphs, punctuation, capitalization, sentence structure, and parts of speech. In this instance the spelling words were chosen because they are "family words" ("cousin," "niece," etc.) and possessives and plurals are taught as part of the spelling activities. Several creative writing opportunities are also included. One is a self-description which begins with one word in the first line and builds up to a final line which contains as many words as the chronological age of the student. The end produces a pyramid of words that describe their likes and dislikes. Students also write a "Guess Which" in which all are given the same first line: "Guess which person I'd like to be." They then go on to compose 3-5 more lines, choosing their own rhyming pattern. Special skill sheets are introduced when appropriate, so that the new concept can be put to immediate use on that part of the assignment.

In addition to the written work, the children are also reading selected autobiographical stories taken from readers, as well as a library book about a famous person in whom they are interested. The thrust of the questions in these stories is aimed at looking for traits and characteristics that make these people so outstanding. Special films on individual differences, even music and art have all been woven into this unit.

Although this unit was developed for sixth graders in an open classroom setting, it can be adapted according to the grade level and physical setup. This unit is designed to be completed in six weeks, with time taken each day to work on a specific aspect. A check list is provided for the student, so that each one always knows exactly where he is and what more needs to be done. The check list is used at the conference session as well. In addition, this unit is implemented at the same time that a Social Studies unit on time and ancient history is introduced, so that the units have continuity. Even math can be brought in as the students learn how to construct their own time line. An outline of this unit has been reproduced below.

Other Language Arts units that have produced excellent written work were those in which the five senses were used as the basic topic, a newspaper unit, and one on mythology. None of these would have been effective without careful planning. Regardless of the kind of classroom or grade level, the teacher must take time to plan carefully and be prepared to follow the unit through effectively. Elementary children can be taught to write interesting creative and grammatically sound compositions. We owe them the opportunity to prepare themselves for the rigors ahead, and for the writing for which they will become responsible. Teaching them to communicate through written work demands planning and structure as well as adequate preparation on the part of the teacher.

LANGUAGE ARTS

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Welcome to the 6th Grade!!! This Language Arts Unit is designed to let us learn about each other, and will combine writing, reading, listening and doing. It is related as well to our first Math and Social Studies units.

The major product due in September will be your own autobiography. Before you begin to write it, do some reading from the assigned list, and follow directions for the story. Remember that descriptive words will make your autobiography colorful and interesting. The "document" should include a paragraph about each of the following:

1. Family background
2. Babyhood facts
3. Early childhood
4. Growing up
5. Current days/Here and now

What can be included? Just about anything that is important to you, especially pets, travels, hobbies, accidents and adventures.

The autobiography may be written in ink if you choose, but must, in all cases, be done neatly and legibly, and contained in a folder of your choice. Now, have a good time compiling and writing about your favorite person, yourself.

I. Background Reading

A. Read any four stories about the famous people from the books listed below. Answer the questions listed below, and be sure to use complete sentences. (Keep your written work in your folder.)

1. The name of the story was ______________________________
2. The name of the person this story was about is __________________

3. Some of the good traits or characteristics this person had in the story were ________________________
4. The hardship this person overcame was ________________________

Here are the readers from which any four stories may be read:

Treasure Old--"Pied Piper," page 313
Arrivals and Departures--"Men Who Looked Ahead," page 326
Trails to Treasure
  "Amelia Earhart," page 126
  "Girl Who Loved the Stars," page 140
  "Henry Can Fix It," page 151
  "Mozart, Wonder Boy," page 163
More Days and Deeds
  "Ben Franklin," page 150
  "Valuable Art Lesson," page 160
  "Apples for the Wilderness," page 168
  "Stern TEacher," page 178
  "For the Honor of Virginia," page 190
  "Boy of Hannibal," page 197
  "Marsh King," page 206
  "Conquering the South Pole," page 222
Cavalcades
  "John Paul Jones," page 247
  "L'Enfant," page 256
  "Dr. Drew," page 279
  "Steinmetz," page 298
Wings to Adventures
  "Hienrich Schlieman," page 284
  "Dr. Schweitzer," page 234
Blue Sky
  "Eugene Field," page 148
  "Walter De La Mare," page 318
Adventure Lands
  "Girl Who Discovered the Comet," page 400
  "Fighting Blacksmith," page 415
Into New Worlds
  "Explorer With a Camera," page 88
  "View from an Attic," page 280 (Ann Frank)
  "Dream High," page 362
  "Off the Beaten Path," page 428
Seven Seas
  "Louis Agossiz," page 105
  "Peppi Teichner," page 28
  "Alexander Bell," page 211
  "Robert Goddard," page 247
  "Frank Lloyd Wright," page 294
  "Matthew Maury," page 411
Skyways to Tomorrow
  "Mozart," page 165
  "B'S of Music," page 168
  "John Appleby," page 187
  "P. T. Barnum," page 245

B. In addition to reading four stories from the above books you are to check out an autobiography of your choice from the books we have in our Learning Center, or from the Library. Time will be provided for you to select your book. When you have finished reading the book, you may answer the same five questions that you did about the stories, or you may write a paragraph telling about the part of the book you most enjoyed.

II. Writing

A. Language Sheets on good paragraph writing and related material.
B. Description of self using one word for the first line, two for the second, up to your age. (Examples will be available.)
C. A Guess Which (you will hear some examples of these before you do your own).
D. Autobiography.

III. Listening

A. You will be able to listen to examples of good paragraphs, Guess Which's, self descriptions, and other related items. Special films will also be shown.

IV. Doing

A. Make a folder to hold all your work--you may decorate it to carry out your autobiographical theme.
B. Bring a baby picture; write your name on the back; give it to the teacher.
C. Make a small flag of your home state (where you were born).
D. Bring magazines for pictures and illustrations/or shoe box for Memory Scene or hanger for "It's Me" mobile.
E. "What's My Name" game based on library book character.

RELATED SPELLING WORDS

1. family
2. grandparents
3. brothers
4. sisters
5. parents
6. babies
7. nieces
8. cousins
9. relatives
10. uncles
11. aunts
12. nephews
13. father
14. mother

Activities:

1. Write the singular form for all plural words.
2. What is the plural spelling for word number 1?
3. What part of speech are all your words? Why?
4. Write a 2-3-4 word sentence using each of your spelling words.
   Example: Mother cooks.

Reminder. Keep all your written work in one folder, so that when you confer with the teacher, you will not have to search for what you have finished.

MY CHECK LIST

ACTIVITY	COMPLETED
Checked out library book, read it, answered questions	
Read my four stories, answered questions	
Completed Language sheets	
Wrote my self-description	
Done my Guess Which	
Brought baby picture, gave it to teacher	
Made State Flag	
Brought magazines, shoe box or hanger	
Made folder for Language Arts	
Made "Memory Scene" or "It's Me" mobile for display	
Finished autobiography (September deadline)	

TEACHING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LITERAL AND FIGURATIVE

James H. Chadbourn

The distinction between literal and figurative is important, but it is one with which many students have difficulty. An effective method of teaching this difference is to have students draw the literal equivalents of such figurative expressions as are listed below. Most students will both enjoy this exercise and emerge from it with a better comprehension of literal and figurative language.

1. The new girl is stuck up.
2. Dad got all tied up at the office.
3. It's raining cats and dogs.
4. He weighed the consequences.
5. They didn't know the ropes.
6. He was over the hill.
7. He lost his head.
8. He was all thumbs.
9. She was crying her heart out.
10. The husband couldn't put his foot down.

A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY...SORT OF

Sharon Crowley, Northern Arizona University

As Ken Donelson noted in the February 1974 issue of the ARIZONA ENGLISH BULLETIN, "no field in English teaching has had so much written about it" as "composition and its teaching practices." That issue of AEB contained an extensive bibliography of research in composition, compositional pedagogy, rhetoric, and rhetorical theory. More recently, Richard Larson has put together selected bibliographies of research and writing about the teaching of composition, which update the material in the 1974 AEB. Larson's bibliographies appear in the May 1975 and May 1976 issues of COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION (reprints are available through NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois, 61801). Larson lists "items that report research which might make a contribution to our knowledge about composition and the teaching of composition" and "items that, while not reports of research, record a significant classroom experience or a noteworthy idea about the teaching of composition." Some, or most, of this work may prove useful to the readers of AEB who are teachers of composition.

In this essay I'd like to meet a different, and I think, a more immediate need of composition teachers; that is, to offer a classification of the kinds of textbooks available for use in the composition class. If a composition class is to be structured around a text, the book's assumptions about how writing is produced are crucial to the direction the course takes. With this in mind, I have tried to set up a series of categories that should enable a teacher who reads the table of contents to classify a book according to its philosophy of composition and to evaluate its potential usefulness for a given class. Before I do that, however, I need to outline what I take to be current thinking on compositional philosophy, and to acknowledge my bias in this matter.

People who teach writing have never been able to agree on how to go about it (that's one reason why they write about it so much). Currently, teachers of writing are divided into two philosophical camps: those who concentrate on the product of the writing, the paper or theme; and those who discuss the psychological process through which writing is created. The textbooks they write reflect their assumptions about what is important in teaching and learning writing--the paper or the sweat that produces it.

The distinction between the two groups is rooted in opposed theoretical notions about the relation between form and content. Product-oriented teachers believe that form and content are separate entities, that ideas exist independent of words and can be expressed in several ways without distorting their meaning. For them, the job of the writer is to find the best way to put on paper thoughts which already exist in his head. Since content is not subject to modification through writing, the product-oriented teacher concentrates his instruction on form: sentence structure, modes of paragraph development, organization, and so on. Product teachers are fond of textbooks which involve the students in analysis and imitation of models written by professional writers, of outlining, and of editing themes for "correctness," which usually means how close the theme approximates some formal standard of excellence which has been discussed prior to the completion of the assignment.

Process teachers, on the other hand, feel that form and content, if not inseparable, are intricately linked. The writer's personality and what he has to say will invariably control the manner in which it is expressed. Thus, process theorists emphasize the act of writing itself, concentrating on helping the writer to communicate with himself. They are concerned not so much with the work itself as they are with the people involved in the communicative process. Process teachers are likely to substitute their students' work for a text, and to insist that writers read their papers to whoever will listen (usually the long-suffering members of the writing class), and to ask for many more revisions of each paper than students think necessary in order to insure that writers have overcome the egocentricity that is inherent in the writing process.

Both approaches to learning how to write may be abused. Exclusive application of the process orientation may result in little more than reams of shapeless soul-baring or simple reporting of sensations on the order of this: "I am really tired. My eyes are burning. I am beginning to get hungry, too." The ultimate absurdity of product theory, on the other hand, is the textbook exercise where students underline the subject once and the predicate twice. And each orientation, since it concentrates on only a portion of the whole activity of writing, has limitations. The traditional analytic approach to teaching writing ignores the most important part of the composing process, where a writer deliberates, communing with himself, trying to discover what he has to say. Process theory, on the other hand, offers little help to the writer who must cope with the reader's expectations and the formal conventions of written language.

Product and process theories are, respectively, analytic and synthetic approaches to solving the problem of learning to write. The trouble is that, used in isolation, each dwells on approximately half of the whole activity of composing. Both approaches, if used in conjunction and with an awareness of their limitations, may prove valuable to novice writers. Process theory helps writers to gain confidence in themselves, to become comfortable with pen and paper. Once something has materialized, analysis can begin, and product theorists have provided students with valuable help in dealing with sentences and paragraphs which refuse to lie down and behave themselves. The textbooks I discuss in this paper tend to have one or another orientation, so that most of them work best in combination with a text from the opposing school of thought. My bias toward process philosophy is no doubt obvious from the papers included in this issue of AEB.

Product theorists may be somewhat arbitrarily subdivided, according to the tone they adopt, into a descriptive group ("the best writers have always done it this way") and a prescriptive group ("you will write this way"). The texts written by those who subscribe to the descriptive philosophy are large compendia of rhetoric, logic, semantics, linguistics, grammar, or other information about language and how it is used. (Examples are the Warriner's series, Brooks and Warren's MODERN RHETORIC, McCrimmon's WRITING WITH A PURPOSE, and Gorrell and Laird's MODERN ENGLISH HANDBOOK. Copies of one or another edition of these books--they always seem to run to five or six editions--should be readily available in most English department libraries.) Apparently the assumption here is that knowledge about language will help writers to employ it, but there is little evidence to support this hope. Often, in their attempts to categorize and simplify, these texts give rhetorical information which has little to do with the practice of actual writers, who seldom develop paragraphs solely through the use of reasons or examples, or write five-paragraph themes. Moreover, as James Moffett has pointed out, such texts force students to "adopt the strategy of error-avoidance":

> The learner is put in the situation of trying to understand and keep in mind all this advice when he should be thinking about the needs of the subject. The text book writer is in the position of having to predict the mistakes that some mythical average student might make. The result is that, in true bureaucratic fashion, the text generates a secondary set of problems beyond those that an individual learner might truly have to deal with in the assignment itself. That is, he has to figure out first of all what the advice means at a time when it can't mean very much. Often he makes mistakes because he misconstrues the advice. In trying to stick to what he was told,

> he is in fact working on two tasks at once--the fulfillment of the advice and the fulfillment of the assignment. (TEACHING THE UNIVERSE OF DISCOURSE, Houghton-Mifflin, 1968, p. 202.)

The study of language, although a valuable activity in itself, is not composition, and should not be substituted for writing practice.

Most of these textbooks are for teachers, not for students. A sad but true state of affairs exists in the English teaching profession in that most of us who are currently teaching composition had no undergraduate training in composition beyond Freshman English. Textbooks which are compendia of information about rhetoric, logic, grammar, and so on are enormously useful to teachers who find themselves faced with a composition class they were never prepared to teach. The books are full of lesson plan ideas for teaching at the later stages of the composition process. But such books should not be put in students' hands.

Occupying a middle ground among the describers are those who feel that students can profit from reading and analyzing essays, plays, poems, or stories written by professional writers. Their texts are collections of short pieces, often dealing with a common theme and having titles like "Pressing Issues" or "Man/Woman Thinks." Among the most popular of these texts are Tighe and Flanigan's SOURCE IDEA TECHNIQUE: A WRITER'S READER, and Fabrizio, Karas, and Menmuir's THE RHETORIC OF YES. The pieces are followed by questions: "Notice how Huxley (or Buckley, or Steinem) organizes this essay around a thesis which appears in the introduction. Identify the thesis and be ready to evaluate the evidence used to support it." Class discussion is then based on students' responses to the questions. Again, this is not writing, but an analytic activity which has only a tangential relation to composition. In addition, students whose own efforts are constantly matched against those of Bertrand Russell or Joan Didion cannot help but become discouraged with the whole thing.

A variation on this theme is the "writing stimulants" text which has students respond to photographs or paintings or music. (The best, and most beautiful, of these is Wilson Pinney and Allen Say's TWO WAYS OF SEEING.) These texts fall prey to the difficulty encountered with readers, however, in that they give no attention to the composing portion of the writing process. Students are simply told to appreciate, go forth, and respond. Papers due on Friday at four o'clock.

The furthest extension of the product orientation is the models approach, wherein students not only analyze but imitate examples of masterful prose, sometimes even to the extent of borrowing other writers' sentence structures and filling in noun and verb slots with words of their own. (Winston and Weathers' COPY AND COMPOSE is a good example of this kind of text.) This method has an advantage over the compendium or analytic approaches, in that students do spend time writing sentences. However, the laborious attention to syntax loads people down with nomenclature--"antithesis," "periodic sentence," "polysyndeton"--which may be useful at cocktail parties, but it must certainly inhibit the conscientious student who is more concerned with including an antithesis in his next theme than with exploring what he needs to say. The antidote to this approach is to discuss models with students (and these should be written by students, not professionals), rather than to teach them as texts for study.

Prescriptive textbooks are usually called handbooks: the best-known of these are Hans Guth's WORDS AND IDEAS and the HARBRACE COLLEGE HANDBOOK. A second class of prescriptive texts are those that dictate matters of style; the most popular of these are Strunk and White's THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE and Sheridan Baker's THE PRACTICAL STYLIST.

Prescriptive writers of textbooks can be recognized by their habit of dispensing unqualified generalizations as infallible rules for creating good prose: "Avoid vagueness by choosing specific and concrete words." One problem with a rule like this, aside from the fact that it overlooks the real difficulty most young writers have in distinguishing between general and specific terms, is its absolutism. Vagueness is not always a function of abstraction; if it were, no one could read philosophy or theology without becoming confused. And what a bore if everybody took this advice. We'd all sound like Hemingway. Levels of abstraction exist in language precisely because writers need them; to always value the specific over the general is to undermine the usefulness of both. A second problem with rules is that they elevate form and exclude content. Students who are urged to think of prescriptive texts as a sort of writer's Bible will soon be convinced that what they have to say is relatively unimportant, so long as it is phrased in specific language, or employs the active voice, or whatever. A corollary but much more serious result of the emphasis on form may be that students learn to tell lies. Consider this advice: "Always put statements in positive form." If students take this seriously, they may be forced to tinker with the truth. For instance, the statement "Mary did not close the door" is presumably an exact rendering of what happened. To say "Mary left the door open" satisfies the prescriptive advice about positive constructions, but changes the meaning of the sentence. Adding another element doesn't help, either. "Mary failed to close the door" says something different about Mary and her motives regarding the door's position (and also about the speaker's attitude toward Mary) than does "Mary succeeded in leaving the door open." If the truth is that Mary was negligent, this last sentence is an example of the dishonest prose favored by politicians and used-car salesmen who are interested not so much in accuracy as in effect.

On the other end of my analysis-synthesis scheme are the process-oriented texts. These books fall into four categories: those of the freewriters, the generative syntacticians, the process-theme writers, and the rhetoricians. (These terms are clumsy and inelegant, I know.) The categories overlap somewhat, because what these books have in common is an emphasis on the act of producing writing. They differ in their assumptions about what part of the process is most important. The freewriters' best representative is Peter Elbow. His book, WRITING WITHOUT TEACHERS (subversive title, that) is an indispensable antidote to the underlining-the-subject-once school of teaching writing. Elbow writes vividly about the struggle involved in self-communication, and in getting something down on paper. Freewriting is the key to Elbow's approach: writers should produce as much and as fast as they can in order to get in touch with their thoughts. The most teachable texts based on this approach are still Ken Macrorie's WRITING TO BE READ and TELLING WRITING. Both Elbow and Macrorie are aware of the importance of feedback and editing in the writing process; they de-emphasize such things in reaction to the ubiquity of the product-orientation. Consequently, their texts should be balanced against a more product-oriented one, lest students get the idea that writing is only self-expression.

The best-known representative of the generative syntax school of writing philosophy is, of course, Francis Christensen. Christensen and his followers feel that a knowledge of the syntactic resources of language will help writers to generate more complex sentences and thus, more complex thoughts. Grammar is not taught formally as an object of study in this approach, but grammatical operations are presented as means of generating prose. Three textbooks from this school appear to have promise: Francis and Bonniejean Christensen's A NEW RHETORIC; William Strong's SENTENCE COMBINING: A COMPOSING BOOK; and Frank O'Hare's SENTENCECRAFT. This approach must be used carefully: the temptation to teach grammar, not composition, is always present. I'm not sure, furthermore, if the method allows enough consideration of the effectiveness of various sentence structures within the context of a whole composition.

I have one category which has, as far as I know, only one member. This is a remarkable book by William Kerrigan entitled WRITING TO THE POINT: SIX BASIC STEPS. Kerrigan's book is written in second person, addressing students, not teachers. What the students eventually produce is the hoary old five-paragraph theme; but Kerrigan emphasizes the process of writing, and re-writing, beginning with a simple sentence which proves in time to be a thesis statement. Each step builds on previous ones; as students progress they see more and more reasons why earlier steps are important. Kerrigan provides his readers not with information but with a method for writing themes in whatever context they may need it. His chapters on distinguishing specific and concrete detail from generalizations and abstractions are the clearest and easiest to teach that I have ever encountered.

Rhetoric may be defined generally as the investigation of what takes place between a speaker and a listener, or a writer and a reader. Rhetoric texts are always concerned with two things: (a) helping writers to produce a message that says what he intends it to say, and (b) helping him to say it so that a reader will understand and respond positively. True rhetoric texts have begun to appear; they emphasize the process of generating prose (called "invention" by classical rhetoricians, "heuristics" or "problem-solving" by modern rhetoricians). The best of these is Young, Becker, and Pike's RHETORIC: DISCOVERY AND CHANGE. The authors protest that they have used the text successfully in freshman writing classes. I learned from hard experience, however, that their work may be too difficult for all but the brightest students at any level. Nevertheless, its use to teachers is incalculable. Like the compendia, RHETORIC: DISCOVERY AND CHANGE contains an inexhaustible series of lesson plans. Unlike them, the activities and exercises are aimed at helping students to find out what they have to say, not at telling them how to arrange it on the page. (Frank D'Angelo discusses Young, Becker, and Pike at more length in the February 1974 issue of AEB, pp. 2-5). Two other excellent rhetorics are Ross Winterowd's THE CONTEMPORARY WRITER and William Irmscher's THE HOLT GUIDE TO ENGLISH. Of the three, Irmscher's is the easiest to read, but his inventive scheme (based on the rhetorical theory of Kenneth Burke) is too abstract for most students to understand with ease.

One last comment: if teachers of composition have not yet read James Moffett's TEACHING THE UNIVERSE OF DISCOURSE they are missing a delightful and informative experience. His discussion of the relation of various modes of discourse to stages of growth in children is lucid and illuminating. Moffett is the writer who set composition pedagogy on its head nearly ten years ago. I recommend it.